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**Citation: Noel-Smith, Kelly Ann (2014) Freud on time and timelessness: the ancient Greek influence. [Thesis] (Unpublished)**

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# Freud on Time and Timelessness: the Ancient Greek Influence

A dissertation presented by

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in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Birkbeck College, University of London  
January 2014

## *Declaration*

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

..... 2014  
Kelly Ann Noel-Smith

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*Freud on Time and Timelessness: the Ancient Greek Influence*

*Abstract*

This thesis turns on two assumptions: first, that there is a current absence within the psychoanalytic library of a consolidated account of Freud's theories of time and timelessness; second, that there is compelling evidence of an influence by the ancient Greek canon on Freud's metapsychology of time. The thesis is that a detailed examination of this influence will bring additional clarity to our understanding of Freud's thoughts about time and timelessness and permit the provision of the currently lacking systematic account of this part of his theory. The author brings the three components of the Greek canon most important to Freud - myth, tragedy and philosophy – into dialogue with psychoanalysis to show the importance of their influence on Freud's ideas on temporality. The dialogue permits novel conclusions to be drawn about Freud's theory of temporality generally and Freud's views on how we acquire time in particular.

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## *Acknowledgments*

My special thanks to Professor Stephen Frosh and Dr. Laurie Spurling, both of Birkbeck College, London, for being my supervisors. I enjoyed and benefited from our discussions and appreciated, in particular, Stephen's careful reading and comments on the various drafts of my thesis. I also want to thank Michael Molnar for his help whilst curator of the Freud Museum and for showing me some of the unpublished work of Freud held there. Thank you, too, to Dr Leonard Bruno, for his advice on Freud's unpublished correspondence with Princess Bonaparte, when he was head of the Manuscript Section at the Library of Congress.

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## INTRODUCTION

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More often than not, there is no reference to 'Time' in the index of books on psychoanalysis. This evidence of a lack of psychoanalytic writing on time is striking because temporality forms such an important theme of Freud's work. The timeless unconscious, *Nachträglichkeit*, the endless repetition compulsion and the processes of consciousness, remembering and working through: all these involve temporality. André Green asked rhetorically: "Was there ever a point in Freud's work where he was not concerned by the subject of time?" (Green, 2002, p. 9); if there was, it is difficult to find. Psychoanalytic theory is permeated by time; and the practice of psychoanalysis seems shaped by it. It is largely the losses that time brings with it which take us into the consulting room: loss of our youth, our opportunities, our loved ones and our future. At the outset, the parties to a psychotherapeutic alliance make a substantial commitment to spend significant time together; and a condition of whether what happens between them is psychoanalysis is the quantity of time, in terms of number of sessions per week, which they share together. And, within the sessions themselves, the temporal boundaries are usually strictly observed. Hilda Doolittle's account of her analysis with Freud includes a nice example: "The other day the Professor had reproached me for jerking out my arm and looking at my watch. He had said, 'I keep an eye on the time. I will tell you when the session is over. You need not keep looking at the time, as if you were in a hurry to get away'" (Doolittle, 1971, p. 17).

The paradox is this: time and timelessness are fundamental principles of psychoanalysis yet Freud does not present a consolidated theory of temporality. Although temporal themes run throughout Freud's work, his specific references to time are highly qualified, any idea of a theory of time being couched in terms of 'hints' (Freud, 1920, p. 28) or 'suspicions' (Freud, 1925b, p. 23). Freud seemed reluctant to make his thoughts on time public. In 1914, for example, having seen from the proofs of the *Jahrbuch* contributions that Tausk intended to make reference to a comment made by Freud at a meeting of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society about

time and space, Freud had the comment withdrawn (Freud, 1914d)<sup>1</sup>. Later in the same year, Freud wrote to Ferenczi: "[S]omething [...] is in process which shouldn't be talked about yet. [...] I only want to reveal to you that, on paths that have been trodden for a long time, I have finally found the solution to the riddle of time and space" (Freud, 1914e, pp. 29 – 30). Freud wrote in similar terms to Abraham on the same day (Freud, 1914f, p. 30) but neither letter goes on to reveal the riddle's solution. Ernest Jones claims that the solution lies in the distinction Freud draws between temporality and spatiality being exclusive qualities of consciousness and unconscious processes respectively (Jones, 1955, p. 196) but I believe that Freud had found a solution both more subtle and more bold. By 1920, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud was claiming that an “exhaustive treatment” of Kant’s philosophy of time and space was necessary in the light of Freud’s psychoanalytic findings (Freud, 1920, p. 28) but this treatment never really follows (although, as I discuss in Chapter Four, Freud does rework some of Kant’s philosophy). And, in one of Freud’s last published letters to Marie Bonaparte, whilst he generously praises her paper, ‘Time and the Unconscious’ (Bonaparte 1940), Freud lets her know that she lacked any grounds to write about his ideas on time because he had not divulged them: “Your comments on “time and space” have come off better than mine would have - although so far as time is concerned I hadn't fully informed you of my ideas. Nor anyone else" (Freud, 1938f, p. 455).

As I discuss in the literature review which follows, the lack of a systematic account of Freud's theory of time has not been remedied by the secondary literature. In 1989, Andrea Sabbadini was able to say that: “In recent years, several authors have published their views on various aspects of time in psychoanalysis, but with the exception of Arlow (1984), and Hartocollis, no one has explored these themes systematically or offered original perspectives about their significance” (Sabbadini, 1989, p. 305). And André Green, in his 2002 work, *Time in Psychoanalysis: some contradictory aspects*, wrote: “I have often pointed out that contemporary psychoanalysis has come up with many ingenious solutions for the problems raised by the notion of space, but barely any with regard to that of time” (Green, 2002, p. 4).

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<sup>1</sup> The periodical *Jahrbuch für psychoanalytische und psychopathologische Forschungen* (Annals of Psychoanalytic and Psychopathological Research) was first published in 1909 by Deuticke. Freud and Bleuler were its initial editors, working in collaboration with Jung. Jung and Bleuler resigned in 1914, leaving Freud as managing director with Abraham and Hitschmann as editors.



More recently, Green wrote: "It is striking that the problem of time has been the source of far fewer discussions than themes relating to space. It would seem that this theme has been avoided" (Green, 2009, p. 1).

In the lack of a consolidated account by Freud of his theory of time and the absence in secondary literature of its remedy, fundamental questions of psychoanalytic theory are difficult to answer fully. How, for example, should Freud's famous definition of the unconscious being timeless be understood? For Freud's definition seems to require a negative reading of what constitutes 'time' so that what is timeless needs to be understood in terms of what time is not. How, too, should we understand our development of an abstract notion of time from an initial state of timelessness? And how do Freud's notions of temporality operate within the context of his two topographies which provide different perspectives of the psychical apparatus and account for different regions of unconscious life?

To answer these questions, I felt drawn to establish a systematic account of Freud's theory of time, to provide the "exhaustive" treatment of the subject Freud suggested was necessary back in 1920. To do so, I decided not only to pull together the temporal themes running through Freud's published works and correspondence but also to put what I found into the context of a particularly strong influence on Freud: that of the ancient Greeks. This was for several reasons: first, because the strength of the influence is undoubted; second, because the three principal components of the Greek canon of most relevance to Freud – myth, tragedy and philosophy – powerfully represent different ways of making meaning of temporal issues; and, third, because I see a clear reflection in Freud's thoughts on time and timelessness of the Presocratic approach which blends myth and reason, speculation and empiricism. By bringing relevant aspects of the ancient Greek canon into dialogue with Freud's thoughts on time, I was able to examine the points of meaningful contact and departure enabling me to draw some novel conclusions about Freud's theory of temporality generally and Freud's views on how we acquire time in particular. This put me in a position to go some way towards providing the currently lacking account of Freud on time.

Time is, of course, a notoriously difficult and slippery concept. St Augustine famously claimed that, once we are asked to think about time, our intuitive understanding of what it is disappears: "What, then, is time? If no one asks of me, I

know; if I wish to explain to him who asks, I know not” (St Augustine’s *Confessions*, Book XI, quoted in Russell, 1993, p. 352)<sup>2</sup>. The *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* struggles to keep the definition of time to one page and provides three contexts, all of which depend on space: a space or extent of time; a point in time; and an indefinite continuous duration regarded as that in which the sequence of events takes place (*OED*, 1988, p. 2308).

Technological changes have driven an increasingly regulated and precise measurement of what we call time, from observations of the Sun to the atomic clocks situated around the globe from which Coordinated Universal Time has been derived since 1972. The increase in precision seems to correlate with a decrease in the importance of personal time and local time. When time's passage was marked by the Sun, for example, each person would have their own midday marked at the point when the Sun was at its height for that person. As sundials were replaced by clocks, a 'time equation' became necessary to take account of the difference between the solar time measured by the elliptical and eccentric orbit of the Earth around the Sun, and the time measurements provided by the regular workings of clocks<sup>3</sup>. Clocks kept local time until the development of the railways in the 1830s which brought with it the requirement for standard time. In 1847, the British railway companies replaced the variance of local time with the mean time of Greenwich, whose meridian was conventionally assumed to lie at zero degrees longitude, a nice example of time being represented by spatial coordinates. In 1880, England enacted The Statutes (Definition of Time) Act "to remove doubts as to the meaning of Expressions relative to Time occurring in Acts of Parliament, deeds and other legal instruments" and stipulating that all references to time in statute or legal documents should be to Greenwich Mean Time unless otherwise stated, a principle which remains intact in The Interpretation Act 1978.

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<sup>2</sup> St Augustine, whom Freud read (for example, Freud 1918a, p. 204), suggested that our abstract understanding of time as containing past, present and future is, in fact, always to do with the present: it involves a current understanding, through memory, that past events have happened; through sight, that present events are happening now; and, through current expectation, that future events will take place.

<sup>3</sup> Adam Frank's *About Time* (Frank, 2011) picks a historical trail through the different ways we have sought to measure time: from the Sun and stars to clocks, and through theories of absolutism, relativism and string theory.

Freud was part of the surge in technological developments which took place in the second half of the nineteenth century. The telephone was introduced in 1876 allowing separated people to speak with each other at the same time and across great distances. It takes time to catch up with technology: when Freud was looking at the disturbance of thought in the 'Project' of 1895, he used the example of his forgetting in agitation to use a recently installed telephone to ring for help (Freud, 1950, p. 357). The introduction of wireless telegraphy seems to have had an almost religious impact: "The omnipresence and penetrating capacity of wireless waves rivalled miraculous action and reversed the direction of divine intervention" (Kern, 2003, p. 317). It brought with it an interest, which Freud shared, in telepathy (Frosh, 2013, p. 103). Wireless technology meant that time signals could be disseminated globally, adding to the impetus for global uniformity to Greenwich Mean Time. The first global time signals were transmitted from the Eiffel Tower in July 1913 and the Greenwich Observatory broadcast its first time signals in February 1924. Standard time gradually followed throughout the world.

Stephen Kern, in *The Culture of Time and Space 1880 - 1918* (Kern, 2003), puts great emphasis on the technological development during the period under his review, concluding that the surge in writings about time to which Freud made his contribution was the cultural representation of the technological explosion which culminated in the First World War. Kern acknowledges Freud's contribution on time during that period as being revolutionary (but wrongly allocates Freud's contribution to a discipline which largely has not accepted or even acknowledged Freud's work):

In addition to the technological developments that were revolutionising the actual experience of time and space, cultural changes were revolutionising ways of perceiving and conceptualising time and space across the cultural world in physics (Einstein's relativity theory), philosophy (Freud's unconscious mental processes), sociology (Durkheim's social relativity of time and space), art (Picasso's Cubism) and literature (Proust's search for lost time and Joyce's stream of consciousness technique) (Kern, 2003, p. xii).

The literary contributors to Kern's list, James Joyce and Marcel Proust, famously explored the connections between time, memory and consciousness in their 1920's publications *Ulysses* and *A la Recherche du temps perdu* respectively. H G Wells (whom Freud met just before his death) also addressed temporal issues during that period in *The Time Machine* (1895), *When The Sleeper Wakes* (1899) and

*Anticipations* (1901). In the same period, J M Barrie wrote about Peter Pan and Wendy in his 1904 play and his novel published in 1911. "Second to the right and straight on till morning" gives the Darling children directions to Never Never Land, a timeless domain, the island of Peter Pan, who defies time in his refusal to grow up.

Kern also refers to Henri Bergson as being a contributor to writings on time. Bergson was developing his theory of time in his doctoral thesis which was published in 1889 as *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (Bergson, 2008). Kern suggests rather controversially of Bergson, Proust and Freud, each a notable contributor to the culture of time in this period, that "the wandering Jew is at home only in time" (Kern, 2003, p 51) and so it is the Jewishness of the three which to some extent shapes their evaluation of the primacy of time. I prefer the view expressed by Graham Frankland in *Freud's Literary Culture* (Frankland, 2000), that we should revise our view that Freud might be representative of a Jewish thinker because Freud was, instead, far more deeply grounded in the European literature of his education. Frankland says that Freud is "typical of the bourgeoisie of his era primarily because of his highly literary German education and culture; and, similarly, he is most typically Jewish, if such a designation means anything at all, in that this *Bildung* – represented by the towering figures of Goethe and Schiller – represented something of an *ersatz* religion to so many liberal, secularised German Jews" (Frankland, 2000, p. 2).

William James ought to have been on Kern's list, too. William James gave voice to the idea of a stream of consciousness in his influential *Principles of Psychology* (James, 1890, p. 240). Freud and James met and their theories of attention, perception and time share some common ground which I discuss in Chapter Four<sup>4</sup>.

In the chapters which follow, I look not to the *impetus* for Freud's writings on time, an impetus which Kern, in particular, locates in sweeping technological changes, but to a profound *influence*: that of the ancient Greeks. Tourney claims in his paper,

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<sup>4</sup> Freud met William James in 1909, when William James came over from Harvard to listen to Freud lecture at Clark. Freud recalled their meeting: "I shall never forget one little scene that occurred as we were on a walk together. He stopped suddenly, handed me a bag he was carrying and asked me to walk on, saying that he would catch me up as soon as he had got through an attack of angina pectoris which was just coming on. He died of that disease a year later; and I have always wished that I might be as fearless as he was in the face of approaching death" (Freud, 1925e, p. 52).

‘Freud and the Greeks: A study of the influence of classical Greek mythology’ (Tourney, 1965), that it was impossible for anyone within the intellectual climate of nineteenth century Europe to avoid the influence of the ancient Greeks (Tourney, 1965, p. 67). Tourney draws support for this view from Butler whose tome, *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany* (Butler, 1935), suggests that the Greek influence was, in fact, more of a stranglehold. Butler's view is not overly controversial: Gomperz, a significant influence in Freud's life, and whose volumes on *Greek Thinkers* remain in Freud's library, opens the first of those volumes with a quote from Sir Thomas Maine to the same effect: “To one small people...it was given to create the principle of Progress. That people was the Greek. Except the blind forces of Nature, nothing moves in this World which is not Greek in origin” (Gomperz, 2010, Vol 1, p. 1). Burkhardt, whose *History of Greek Civilization* Freud was reading at the end of the nineteenth century, whilst writing *The Interpretation of Dreams*, took a similar view: “All subsequent objective perception of the world is only elaboration on the framework the Greeks began. We see with the eyes of the Greeks and use their phrases when we speak” (cited in Armstrong, 2005, p. 100). In essence, the Greek ideal was, in Freud's time, as Armstrong neatly expresses it, the centre of Europe's 'family romance', a crucial part of an elaborate narrative which operated to make ancient Greece both the source and the governing principle of contemporary Europe (Armstrong, 2005, p. 18).

The short biographical account which follows operates to situate Freud within this ancient Greek narrative, to show its influence on Freud throughout his life: from school, where Freud excelled in the classics; through university, where Freud formed strong connections with the Aristotelian expert, Brentano, and a lasting friendship with the renowned Ancient Greek specialist, Theodor Gomperz; through Freud's development of psychoanalysis, which incorporates so many Greek terms and themes; and in his personal life, where Freud identified himself with Oedipus, his daughter with Antigone and where the Acropolis provided the site for a funny turn. Even in death, the influence is apparent: Freud's ashes were interred in a Grecian urn from his collection until it was smashed in an attempted theft in January 2014.

When Freud entered the Leopoldstädter Kommunalreal-und Obergymnasium, a year earlier than was usual, he moved into an elite system whose foundations were laid by

Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767 - 1835), the Prussian minister for education, who took the Greek character to be representative of “the original character of humankind overall” (cited by Armstrong, 2005, p. 16). Freud was top of the class for the last six of the eight years he was there (Jones, 1972, p. 22) and, when Freud left aged seventeen, it was with a distinction in his *Matura*. Freud tells Emil Fluss that the unseen passage in the Greek paper was from Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* which Freud had already read on his own account and “made no secret of it” (Freud, 1873a, p. 5). Freud retained a lifelong pride in his Greek. Seventy years or so later, in 1934, Freud wrote to his friend, Arnold Zweig: “I have always been proud of how much Greek I have remembered (choruses from Sophocles, passages from Homer)” (Freud, 1934, p. 71). Jones claims that Freud was “completely at home” in Latin and Greek (Jones, 1972, p. 24) and this is confirmed by a review of the Latin and Greek references given in the *Standard Edition*: Aeschylus, Aesculapius, Anaximander, Apuleius, Archimedes, Aristophanes, Aristotle, Artemidorus, Democritus, Diodorus, Diogenes, Euripides, Heraclitus, Herodotus, Hippocrates, Homer, Horace, Ovid, Plato, Pliny, Plotinus, Plutarch, Protagoras, Pythagoras, Socrates, Sophocles and Virgil form an impressive list.

Freud entered the University of Vienna in 1873 to read medicine. Freud later recalled a daydream that he had had as a student, one where his own bust stood in the University Court with those of other famous professors, his bust inscribed with an extract from *Oedipus Rex* which translates as “Who divined the famed riddle and was a man most mighty”. Uncannily, this was the very inscription chosen by his Viennese admirers for a medallion presented to Freud on his fiftieth birthday with Freud’s side-portrait on one side and a reproduction of Ingres’ *Oedipus and the Sphinx* on the other (Jones, 1955, p. 15). A reproduction of the painting still hangs in Freud’s consulting room and versions of it were used in Freud’s bookplate and the logo of the *Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag* press.

As well as the usual courses for a medical student, Freud took optional twice-weekly lectures with Professor Franz Brentano in logic and philosophy (Freud, 1875c, p. 101). Freud described Brentano as a “genius” (Freud, 1875a p. 95) and Brentano almost persuaded Freud to combine his medical doctorate with one in philosophy (ibid). It was through Brentano’s recommendation that Freud translated J S Mill's

essay on Plato from English to German under the supervision of the renowned Theodor Gomperz, published in J. S. Mill's *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 12, Leipzig, 1880<sup>5</sup>.

On graduating, Freud went into research at the University. A travel bursary from the Faculty of Medicine enabled Freud to study under Charcot at the Salpêtrière in 1885. On his return to Vienna, Freud spent a further six years working under Brücke, whom Freud described as “the greatest authority who affected me more than any other in my whole life” (Freud, 1927b, p. 394). During that time, Freud became engaged to Martha Bernays and changed path, to better paid work as a doctor. Freud collaborated with Josef Breuer in work on hysteria, Freud reaching to Greek myth for a description of its treatment which he thought constituted a “Sisyphean task” (Freud, 1893, p. 263). Breuer and Freud became aware that hysterical symptoms were often the result of “strangled affect” (Freud, 1893, p. 255) and that a cathartic release of the hysterical symptom could take place if, through hypnosis, the scene of trauma was revisited so that the previously insufficient reaction to it could be completed. Catharsis, from the Greek *katharsis*, is acknowledged by Freud as being Breuer’s term: in his short paper, ‘On Psychotherapy’ (Freud, 1905c), Freud said: “[I] have actually come to confine myself to one form of treatment, to the method which Breuer called *cathartic*, but which I myself prefer to call ‘analytic’ [...]” (Freud, 1905c, p. 259). Catharsis was later described by Freud as “the first step to the psycho-analytic method” (Freud, 1919b, p. 208). Notably, Gomperz’ translation of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, a copy of which remains in Freud’s library, includes an essay by Von Berger on ‘Truth & Error in Aristotle’s Catharsis Theory’. It contains this sentence: “the

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<sup>5</sup> This was the start of Freud’s long relationship with the Gomperz family. Gomperz’ *Interpretation of Dreams and Magic* published in 1866, following the publication of Artemidorus’ *Book of Dreams*, may well have influenced Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1900). It was Gomperz’ influential *Griechische Denker* [*Greek Thinkers: A History of Ancient Philosophy*] (Gomperz (2010)) to which Freud referred as “a book with which one is on the kind of terms one as with ‘good’ friends, books to which one owes some part of one’s knowledge of life and philosophy” (Freud, 1907b, p. 269). In a touching letter to Gomperz’ widow, Elise, in 1913, thanking her for sending him Gomperz’ paper on Plato, Freud indicates Gomperz’ early influence: “The little notebook containing the handwriting of your unforgotten husband reminded me of that time lying so far behind us, when I, young and timid, was allowed for the first time to exchange a few words with one of the great men in the realm of thought. It was soon after this that I heard from him the first remarks about the role played by dreams in the psychic life of primitive men—something that has preoccupied me so intensively ever since” (Freud, 1913f, p. 303). Freud went on to correspond with Gomperz’ son, Heinrich, who followed in his father’s footsteps and became a professor of philosophy at the University of Vienna, Freud thanking Heinrich in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* for a discussion on the myth of the original three sexes and its possible origins with the Upanishads (Freud, 1920, p. 57, footnote).

Cathartic Treatment of Hysteria, which the physicians Dr Josef Breuer and Dr Sigmund Freud have described, is very appropriate for making the Cathartic theory of tragedy understandable" (as cited in Mitchell-Boyask, 1984, p. 29).

Freud's correspondence with Fliess reveals that Freud immersed himself in Burckhardt's *History of Greek Civilization* whilst working on *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1899b, p. 342; Freud, 1899c, p. 344). Freud goes on to incorporate Greek themes within much of the language of psychoanalysis. His use of the Greek myths of Eros and Narcissus, and the Sophoclean tragedy of Oedipus is very well known. He draws, too, on the strength of the immortal Titans and the irrepressibility of the ghosts of Hades to capture the element of the timeless quality of unconscious wishes (Freud, 1900, p. 553; and pp. 577 - 578); finds in the legend of the Labyrinth a representation of the child's phantasy of anal birth (Freud, 1933, p. 25); and interprets Medusa's head as the motif of the fright of castration (Freud, 1933, p. 24).

This short biography of Freud should confirm that the ancient Greek influence on Freud and thus psychoanalysis was profound. What I do in the following chapters is explore those components of the Greek canon on which Freud drew more than any others - Greek myth, tragedy and philosophy - to show how each of these in their different ways can be seen at work in Freud's thoughts on temporality: sometimes as a direct and acknowledged influence; sometimes less so.

Greek mythology is the subject matter of Chapter One. Greek mythology formed part of Freud's ideal syllabus for a training college for psychoanalysts (Freud, 1926b, p. 246). However, Freud viewed mythology as a discipline for psychoanalysis not so much to inform as to conquer (Freud, 1909d, p. 255). He did not take kindly to classical mythologists, because of their reluctance to view mythology through his psychoanalytic lens, and pilloried them in a 1909 letter to Jung as being either "prigs" or "lunatics" (Freud, 1909e, p. 265). It may have been Freud's sense that mythologists failed to appreciate the psychoanalytic interpretation of their subject matter which led him to found the journal *Imago* in 1912 (succeeded by the *American Imago* in 1939) whose articles often deal with the thematic connections to be made between psychoanalysis and myth. As I discuss in the literature review which follows, it remains the case that theoretical studies of Greek myth tend to lack a psychoanalytic perspective.



Freud claimed that we project into the Greek gods those desires which we have had to renounce (Freud, 1932a, p. 189). Hesiod's *Theogony*, a poem written at the end of the eighth century BC, and on which Freud drew, provides the genealogy of the principal gods of the Greek myths into whom these renounced desires are projected. Hesiod tells of the spontaneous emergence of Chaos, Gaia, Tartarus and Eros; of Gaia's unassisted conception of a son, Uranus, who becomes her lover; their son, Kronos, who castrates his father with his mother's assistance and takes his sister, Rhea, as his lover; and their son, Zeus, who leads the Olympian gods into successful warfare against the Titans. The myths' thematic structure provides an ideal framework through which to explore temporally important questions not only about our own beginnings and endings but also about the phantasies and fears which underlie the incestuous, murderous, cannibalistic and vengeful themes of the Greek myths.

Freud saw it as a task of psychoanalysis to translate what we see in myths back into a psychology of the unconscious, "to transform *metaphysics* into *metapsychology*" (Freud, 1901, pp. 258 – 259, his emphasis). Adhering to the spirit of Freud's transformative exercise, my focus in Chapter One is on three distinct elements: the material of the myths; the unconscious elements that the material represents; and the psychic activities which underpin the creation of both the material and the mode of its representation, activities to which Freud explicitly connects our development of a notion of abstract time.

The material of the Greek tragedians is that of myth: the families of tragedy suffer from enactment of the same phantasies of incest, revenge and cannibalism that are projected into the gods. In Chapter Two, I look at Aeschylus' and Sophocles' respective representations of the fourth generation of the families of the Houses of Atreus and of Thebes: at their portrayals of Orestes and Oedipus, young men, each of whom kills a parent. Their treatment by Freud is striking: Freud makes only one oblique reference in his entire collected works to Orestes yet chose to put Oedipus at the heart of psychoanalysis. My comparison of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* with Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* suggests that the tragedians' representations of Orestes' and Oedipus' deeds, intentionality, guilt, trial and punishment can be differentiated on the basis of the *temporal* nature of the juridical questions each tragedian frames. My exercise draws out a temporally relevant and largely unexplored aspect of Freud's theory: that

of how we develop a capacity for guilt. The temporal relevance follows from Freud's cautious suggestion that the "time-factor" (Freud, 1914c, p. 96, footnote) develops together with those internal agencies whose voices of judgment produce guilt: the censor, conscience and the superego. Based on my findings, I make what I think is a compelling argument as to why Freud put Oedipus at the centre of psychoanalysis.

A third important component of the Ancient Greek canon is Greek philosophy. In Chapter Three, I look at the influence on Freud's theory of time of the Presocratics, Plato and Aristotle. I show that Freud seems to frame his profound psychoanalytic findings about the creation and destruction of time in terms of the myths and cosmologies of the Greek philosophers rather than their philosophies of time. By way of introduction to that discussion, it is interesting to note the extent to which Freud's views about philosophy changed over his lifetime. As a young man, Freud hoped philosophy would constitute a refuge in his old age (Jones, 1957, p. 44); at university, he chose to study philosophy in addition to medicine and nearly combined his medical doctorate with one in philosophy; in middle age, Freud wrote to Fliess that: "As a young man my only longing was for philosophical knowledge, and now that I am changing over from medicine to psychology I am in the process of fulfilling this wish" (Freud, 1896b, p. 180). In the same year, however, Freud was making public in 'The Aetiology of Hysteria' his complaint that philosophy was too speculative, insufficiently evidence-based (Freud 1896a, pp. 220 – 221), the paper perhaps reflecting Freud's desire to demonstrate to his medical peers that psychoanalysis, unlike philosophy, employed a rigorous scientific methodology. And, in 'The Claims of Psycho-Analysis to Scientific Interest' (Freud, 1913c), Freud suggested that philosophers tend to adopt one of two stances towards the unconscious: either taking it to be a mystical entity whose relationship to the mind has not been clarified; or identifying what is mental only with what is conscious. Philosophy, claimed Freud, needed to recognise its failure to acknowledge unconscious mental activity and accommodate the findings of psychoanalysis (Freud, 1913c, p. 178). In his 'Autobiographical Study', Freud claimed he had avoided any contact with philosophy, "greatly facilitated by constitutional incapacity" (Freud, 1925e, p. 59) and philosophy is notable for its absence from Freud's ideal syllabus for a training college for psychoanalysts (Freud, 1926b, p. 246). As an old man, rather than philosophy proving the solace for which he had hoped as a young man, Freud was describing it in

a letter to Eitington of April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1928, as a “pitiable waste of intellectual powers” (Jones, 1957, p. 148).

Chapter Three looks at the Presocratics’ move from myth and mysticism to science in their search for the stuff and the source of all things. Freud was clearly interested in this paradigm shift: he jotted "Forscher v Mystiker" [researcher vs mystic] in the margin of page 58 of his copy of the first volume of Gomperz' *Griechische Denker* [*Greek Thinkers: A History of Ancient Philosophy*] (Mitchell-Boyask, 1984, p. 28). I use this jotting for the title of Chapter Three because one of the themes of the chapter is Freud’s combination of the attributes of researcher and mystic, his use of both science and myth in his views on temporality: not Forscher *or* Mystiker but Forscher *and* Mystiker.

Chapter Four consolidates the themes of the first three chapters within a much more detailed and systematic account of Freud’s theory of time, an account which not only grounds the temporal themes which have emerged from the preceding chapters but also examines the points of Freud’s theory of temporality where the ancient Greek influence is *not* in evidence. I establish Freud’s theory of time from his notes and letters in addition to his published works. Freud’s correspondence with Fliess, Ferenczi, Abraham and Princess Bonaparte, minutes of meetings of the Vienna Psycho-Analytical Society and Freud’s published and unpublished desk jottings form an important additional part of the temporal trail which can be traced through Freud’s early works on hysteria, the ‘Project’ (Freud, 1950), *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1900), ‘Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning’ (Freud, 1911b), the metapsychological papers of 1915, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud, 1920), *The Ego and the Id* (Freud, 1923a), ‘A Note Upon the Mystic Writing-Pad’ (Freud, 1925b), ‘On Negation’ (Freud, 1925d) and the *Outline of Psycho-Analysis* (Freud, 1938a). I locate Freud's notions of timelessness and time within his two topographies: the first topography, which distinguishes between the systems unconscious, preconscious and conscious; and his second, structural, theory which differentiates the three agencies of id, ego and super-ego. The first topography, in evidence in the neurological framework of the ‘Project’, and clearly set out in Chapter VII of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1900), is further developed by Freud in his metapsychological papers of 1915. The second topography evolves from Freud’s

introduction of the death drive in 1919/1920. Freud locates both topographies within a spatial model within which each system or agency has a specialised role: hence Freud's important insistence, for example, on the incompatibility between the functions of memory, where something is necessarily retained, and perception, which is something necessarily fleeting and without trace.

Freud did not think his two topographies were irreconcilable: various diagrams show the psychic apparatus sub-divided into the systems and agencies of both topographies, the latest in *Moses and Monotheism* (Freud, 1939, p. 96). The topographies do, however, offer different perspectives of the psychical apparatus. Under the first topography, there are bottom-up and top-down aspects: bottom-up, there is the idea that everything emerges from the unconscious, so that time is something we might gain as we develop; top-down, there is the dynamic notion that the unconscious is constituted by repression, so that time is something we can lose. Under the second topography, in which consideration of the drives takes on more importance, I suggest that the work of Eros might be seen in the ego's preconscious ability to forge chronological connections and the work of the death drive in evidence in breaking those temporal links.

Chapter Four divides into three parts. The first is on time and how we develop a notion of it from an initial state of timelessness. The second part of the chapter is on timelessness and what Freud really meant by insisting that the timeless processes of the unconscious must be understood in terms of what conscious processes are not (Freud, 1920, p. 28; and Freud, 1933, p. 73). I examine Freud's four 'negative' characteristics of the timeless unconscious: the lack of temporal order in the unconscious; the failure of the unconscious to acknowledge the passage of time; the indestructibility of the unconscious; and the inapplicability of the idea of time to the unconscious. My discussion takes account of the different regions of unconscious life, clarified by Freud's second topography, to show that Freud's defining characteristics of timelessness capture the repressed unconscious of the first topography and the id of the second topography.

The third and final section of Chapter Four examines the role of the drives in the temporal process. I look at Freud's claim that the interplay of Eros and the death drive "dominates all of life's riddles" (Freud, 1922, p. 339) to see how far this claim can

apply to the most fundamental of riddles: that of time. I show that, because Eros and the death drive both pull to states of timelessness, another factor is required to give temporal rhythm to their interplay: the reality principle. It is the reality principle's mediation of the drives' interplay which allows us to order the events we remember, experience and anticipate into the categories of past, present and future through which we structure our lives.

In essence, the chapters which follow bring three components of the Greek canon - myth, tragedy and philosophy – into dialogue with psychoanalysis to show the importance of their influence in Freud's ideas on temporality. The exercise is one which I believe permits the expansion of Freud's 'hints' (Freud, 1920, p. 28) and 'suspicions' (Freud, 1925b, p. 23) into something approaching a full account of Freud's theory of time and its negative, timelessness.

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

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My thesis turns on two assumptions: first, that there is a current absence within the psychoanalytic library of a consolidated account of Freud's theories of time and timelessness; second, that there is compelling evidence of an influence between the ancient Greek canon and Freud's metapsychology of time. My thesis is that a detailed examination of this influence will bring additional clarity to our understanding of Freud's thoughts about time and timelessness and permit the provision of the currently lacking systematic account of this part of his metapsychology. There are thus two broad bodies of psychoanalytically inclined work which relate to my thesis: those relating to the ancient Greek canon; and those on Freud on time and timelessness. The review which follows provides a critical analysis of the relevant works within these two categories with a view to establishing an interface between them in which to locate my own work.

The ancient Greek canon is one of several influences on Freud which may have contributed to the development of his theory of time. Other important influences include the scientific, the literary, the Jewish and, more generally, the cultural. I chose to limit the scope of my thesis to that of the ancient Greek influence because, as I emphasised in the introduction, it is profound, speaking through and shaping other influences from Freud's culture.

Most of Freud's biographers refer to the importance of the ancient Greek canon for Freud: Ernest Jones' *Sigmund Freud: Life and Work* (Jones, 1955; Jones, 1957; and Jones, 1972), Peter Gay's *Freud: A Life for our Time* (Gay, 1998) and Sulloway's *Freud, Biologist of the mind: beyond the psychoanalytic legend* (Sulloway, 1992) all do; George Makari's *Revolution in Mind* (Makari, 2008), however, does not. Peter Rudnytsky's *Freud and Oedipus* (Rudnytsky, 1987) and Robert Young's *Ideas in Psychoanalysis: Oedipus Complex* (Young, 2001) go further, highlighting Freud's identification with Oedipus. But none of the biographical works I reviewed connects Freud's influences, Greek or otherwise, to the development of his theory of time.

Stephen Kern's *The Culture of Time and Space 1880 - 1918* (Kern, 2003), Graham Frankland's *Freud's Literary Culture* (Frankland, 2000) and Richard Armstrong's excellent *A Compulsion for Antiquity: Freud and the Ancient World* (Armstrong, 2005) all look at the influences on Freud of the period in which Freud was writing. Kern's account suggests that technological changes provided the impetus for the surge in writings about time in the period leading up to the First World War. A wide-ranging review means that Kern gives very little consideration to the content of Freud's writings. Frankland, in his study of the European literary canon in which Freud was grounded and its impact on his work, claims that Freud was deeply rooted in the tradition of the European literature in which his education was grounded. Frankland places Freud's literary culture as being logically prior to his psychoanalytic insights, persuasively claiming that to ignore this priority impoverishes our understanding of Freud: "the doctrine cannot simply be abstracted from his texts, at least not without stripping it from the tensions and ambiguity that allow us to make sense of his relations with his literary culture" (Frankland, 2000, p. 235). Frankland focuses in particular on Goethe's influence on Freud but also includes reference to Freud's use of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and Empedocles' principles, claiming that Freud finds in these Greek texts the expression of certain of his theories. But he does not develop the idea that these Greek influences can be seen at work in Freud's theory of time. Armstrong locates Freud's "compulsion" in antiquity not only in his schooling but also within "the explosive changes brought about by the Darwinian revolution, the growing visibility of ethnographic and anthropological discourse, the professionalization of historiography and archaeology, and the ever-expanding public appetite for sweeping historical narrative" (Armstrong, 2005, p. 31). Armstrong's claim is that Freud's interest in antiquity lies predominantly in his discovering there the validation of his hypotheses which Freud could then reconfigure into his psychoanalytic theory. Armstrong's argument is convincing: and I develop its implications: in particular, in the context of Freud's use of Empedocles and Plato. But I go further, too, to suggest that Freud takes more from myth than just material to confirm his own hypotheses: I show that Freud looks at the myth-making process, too, and that this reveals much about the time-making activity.

Existing work thus confirms the importance and relevance of the ancient Greek influence on Freud but without looking at the specific influence of the canon on his

theory of temporality. I narrowed my scope to look only at the influence of three of the canon's important components: Greek mythology, tragedy and philosophy. These constitute the most significant resources from which Freud drew, garnered from his education and wider literary interests. My focus was on those aspects where a particularly clear influence on Freud's theory of time was in evidence. Thus, with mythology, I restricted my attention to the Greek myth of origins, as related by Hesiod's *Theogony*; with tragedy, to Aeschylus' *Orestia* and Sophocles' Theban plays and, with philosophy, to four philosophers to whom Freud makes significant reference: Anaximander, Empedocles, Plato and Aristotle.

My research immediately threw up the uneasy relationship between psychoanalysis and mythology. The classicist, Jean-Pierre Vernant, in the preeminent work of its kind, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1988), makes a particularly vehement attack on Freud to show that Freud was “not himself a scholar of myth” (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1988, p. 90). With Levi-Strauss the notable exception, Levi-Strauss finding in Freud a re-working of pre-existing myths (Levi-Strauss, 1955; 1988), it remains the case that theoretical studies of Greek myth tend to lack a psychoanalytic perspective: the studies of myth by Kirk (1974) and Burkert (1983), for example, have been reviewed in these terms by Caldwell (Caldwell, 1989). Recently, however, two works have been published by writers more sympathetic to the relationship between psychoanalysis and mythology: Laurence Coupe's *Myth: The New Critical Idiom* (Coupe, 2009) includes a (largely Jungian) psychoanalytic perspective in his work on the transformative and evolving function of myth; and *Classical Myth and Psychoanalysis: Ancient and Modern Stories of the Self* (Zajko and O'Gorman, 2013) provides an array of contributions which elaborate aspects of the myths which Freud (and others) have used to illustrate certain psychoanalytic themes. There is a lightness of touch in all of these papers which means that a detailed examination of Freud's theory is largely avoided and certainly no connection between myth and the psychoanalytic theory of time is established.

My review of the material on myth further revealed that, where a psychoanalytic perspective is adopted, it tends to be one which interprets the myths in psychoanalytic terms rather than show the theoretical developments Freud made through examination of the myth-making activity itself. Freud's followers, Karl Abraham and Otto Rank,



for example, provide this interpretative function in ‘Dreams and Myths: A Study in Race Psychology’ (Abraham, 1913) and *Myth of the Birth of the Hero* (Rank, 1959). More recently, Richard Caldwell's *The Origin of the Gods: a psychoanalytic Study of Greek Theogonic Myth* (Caldwell, 1989), provides an interesting psychoanalytic interpretation of the myth of origins but does not provide a detailed examination of the influence of the myth on Freud's theory. Where there are exceptions to this interpretative approach, these tend to be with a view to using the myths to illustrate a development of psychoanalytic theory close to the writer's interests: Victoria Hamilton, for example, in her illuminating *Narcissus and Oedipus: the children of psychoanalysis* (Hamilton, 1982), looks at the Greek myths of Narcissus and Oedipus in terms of attachment theory; and Amber Jacobs' *On Matricide: Myth, Psychoanalysis and the Law of the Mother* looks at the myth of Metis in terms of a feminist perspective, providing a convincing argument that Metis, Athena's mother, has been wrongly marginalised.

There seem, then, to be three perspectives on Freud's use of myth: that of the classicists, who take it to be largely irrelevant; that of those who seek to interpret the characters of myths psychoanalytically; and that of those who mediate their approach through their own academic perspective. I try to adopt a different approach in my examination of how Freud, in his own words, seeks to “transform *metaphysics* into *metapsychology*” (Freud, 1901, pp. 258 – 259, his emphasis). My examination of Freud's transformative exercise results in a focus on both the myth and the myth making activity: a psychic activity to which Freud explicitly connects our development of a notion of abstract time.

With Greek tragedy, I again narrowed the scope of my thesis to an aspect of Freud's use of Greek tragedy which I believe to be particularly influential on Freud's theory of time: the selection by Freud of Sophocles' tragedy of *Oedipus Rex* to put at the centre of psychoanalysis. Development of my thesis involved an examination of four areas: the importance of the transition from Greek myth to Greek tragedy; Freud's use of the tragedy genre; Freud's choice and use of Sophocles' Oedipus; and the relevance of that choice to Freud's theory of time.

Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, specifically address the succession of myth by tragedy (which then, in its turn, cedes place to philosophy), asserting that Greek tragedy

"mark[s] a new stage in the development of inner man and of the responsible agent" (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1988, p. 23). Their conclusion is that the time was then ripe for tragedians to focus on a particular human consequence of our gradual separation from the mythical gods: that of "tragic consciousness of responsibility" (ibid, p. 27). Tragedy emerges to express the tension which existed between the past, represented by myth, and the present, constituted by the world of the city state (ibid, p. 33). To convey this tension, the Greek tragedians used legal terminology to capture the conflicts within the domains of religion, morality and law (ibid, p. 38). I specifically draw on this point to illustrate, through a contrast of the legal issues confronting Aeschylus' Orestes and Sophocles' Oedipus, Freud's theory of the two-stage process whereby, through an internalisation of what is external, we develop the capacity for self-judgment and guilt, a capacity which a detailed reading of Freud shows develops hand in hand with the time-factor.

The transition from a focus on the divine to the human being is a specific marker of the emergence of tragedy and one observed by Freud in his 1932 paper, The 'Acquisition and Control of Fire' (Freud, 1932a). André Green, in his 1975 paper, 'Orestes and Oedipus', (Green, 1975), criticises Melanie Klein for failing to distinguish between gods, demi-gods and men. Green's own analysis of the function of tragedy, however, although it does differentiate between myth and tragedy, claims that tragedy itself functions as a transitional object: "Therefore I shall say that the myths transposed into the stage, and tragedy as a whole, functioned as a *collective transitional object* between internal and external reality" (Green 1975, p. 364). I make a different point from Green, differentiating Greek tragedy from Greek myth in psychoanalytic terms by highlighting the nuanced tense change from the wishful 'if only!' of myth to the admonitory 'look what happens if', of tragedy and connecting this to the psychic transition whereby the ego and superego emerge from the id, taking us from the state of amoral timelessness represented by myths into the guilt-ridden time of tragic consciousness.

Again, as with myth, there seems to be a tendency for psychoanalytic writers to interpret the characters of the Greek tragedy genre psychoanalytically. Melanie Klein does this in her paper, 'Some Reflections on the Oresteia', in her assessment of the leader of the chorus in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* as representative of Orestes' superego

(Klein, 1963). Alford's *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Greek Tragedy* (Alford, 1992) does this, too, in his review of the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. If I add anything to this approach, it will only be in passing: my intention is, as it was in my discussion of myth, to show how Freud uses Greek tragedy in his own theory, not to use his work to interpret the thoughts and actions of the characters portrayed in Greek tragedy.

The idea that theatre can offer a metaphor for psychic reality is discussed by Joyce McDougall in her *Theatre of the Mind: Illusion and Truth on the Psychoanalytical Stage* (McDougall, 1982) and *Theatre of the Body: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Psychosomatic Illness* (McDougall, 1989). McDougall does not refer to those aspects of the Greek canon on which I draw but I share with her the view that external theatre can mirror our own internal dramas. I hope to have extended this metaphor in the suggestion that, in addition to the importance of the play and the players, we might consider, too, the idea that theatrical development mirrors psychic development. Although changing theatrical devices are referred to in texts on Greek tragedy, and Freud was aware of them, no psychoanalytical conclusions seem drawn specifically from them. Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, for example, mention the changes in numbers of actors only in parenthetical passing (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1988, p. 305). My thesis breaks new ground here in its discussion of Sophocles' innovative introduction of the third actor in terms of the dynamic theatrical space thus afforded and its representation of the similar psychic development in which time is an emergent quality.

On the genre itself, the literature seems either to ignore Freud or to suggest that Freud is relevant only as a trespasser, looting the genre to appropriate aspects of it for his own purposes. Edith Hall's *Greek Tragedy: Suffering under the Sun* (Hall, 2010) makes no reference to Freud at all. Nancy Rabinovitz's *Greek Tragedy*, which examines the notion that interpreting Greek tragedy through modern frameworks can throw light on the issues both within Greek society and our own (Rabinowitz, 2008), does include psychoanalysis as one of these frameworks but her coverage is too short to provide anything more than introductory text. Sarah Winter, in *Freud and the Institution of Psychoanalytic Knowledge* (Winter, 1999), makes the questionable assumption that Freud's subscription to the goat-song theory of the origin of tragedy

was to make the genre specifically relevant to his own theory of the primal horde (Winter, 1999, p. 69). Jean Vernant, in *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1988), belittles Freud's attempt to find meaning in tragedy beyond that of the Greek scholar or historian (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1988, p. 86). As Vernant bluntly states it: "Freud's interpretation of tragedy in general and Oedipus Rex in particular has had no influence on the work of Greek scholars. They have continued their research just as if Freud had not spoken" (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1988, p. 93). This is a shame as, as I show, Freud makes a potentially major contribution to do with the origins of the genre, one connected to his theory of time.

Freud puts Sophocles' Oedipus at the centre of psychoanalysis but makes only one oblique reference to Orestes' family. I ask why Freud privileges Oedipus by way of comparison of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* with Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. The comparison seemed an obvious one for the similarities between Oedipus and Orestes are many: the heroes are both young men who kill one of their parents; and the same number of generations separate each of them from the heads of their respective houses, Cadmus and Atreus. André Green's paper, 'Oedipus and Orestes' (Green, 1975), also compares the two heroes, highlighting some important differences between the two myths: the quest for truth in the Theban plays, as opposed to one for revenge in the *Oresteia*; and the question for Oedipus: 'who killed the King?', as opposed to the command for Orestes: 'Kill the Queen to avenge the King'. Green's conclusion is that Orestes suffers a psychosis, Oedipus a neurosis and that "Orestes' complex can represent the missing double of the Oedipus complex—the negative aspect—provided that we add that something is absent in *Oedipus Rex*—his psychotic episode, over which he triumphed (Green, 1975, p. 364). Green's comparison brings out the private madness suffered by Orestes. My comparison exercise was with a view to show something different: to demonstrate that the reason Freud put Sophocles' Oedipus at the heart of psychoanalysis, yet mentions the *Oresteia* only once, is directly relevant to Freud's theory of time. The exercise provided an opportunity to counter Vernant's suggestion that Freud proceeds in a simplistic fashion to reduce of all Greek mythology to a particular aspect of a particular play (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1988, p. 93) and allowed me to introduce a new perspective: that Freud's choice of Sophocles' Oedipus was a consequence of Freud's

recognition of the representation within Sophocles' tragedy of Oedipus of the framework of mind from within which time can emerge.

It was important to ensure my thesis remained true to Freud. This issue arose particularly when considering the position of John Steiner, who wrote the classic paper, 'Turning a blind eye: the cover-up for Oedipus; (Steiner, 1985). Steiner bases his view that Oedipus and those around him really knew what was going on on Vellacott's reading of the text, not Freud's. Freud's own reading of the tragedy is the traditional one: that Oedipus did not know what he was doing. I follow Freud's reading in my discussion of the ways in which Oedipus' guilt can be differentiated from Orestes' and the points of relevance to Freud's theory of time which follow from this contrast.

A significant question which I do not pursue in my thesis is whether things have changed since Freud, something André Green raises in 'Oedipus and Orestes' asking: "Are we indifferent to *Oedipus Rex* or have we developed a kind of cultural immunity to it since Freud explained the reasons for its tremendous impact?" (Green, 1975, p. 355). Green does not answer the question, deliberately leaving it open for the consideration of his audience. Rachel Bowlby, in her book, *Freudian mythologies: Greek tragedy and modern identities* (Bowlby, 2007), suggests that we need to consider whether the Oedipal configuration is as relevant as it was in Freud's time, given the changes since then in our ideas of what constitutes a family. Judith Butler makes a related point in her consideration of the role of Oedipus' sister/daughter Antigone, suggesting that Antigone's non-normative family and her life choices present the possibility of a different psychoanalytic theory not bound by the 'compulsory heterosexuality' which is assumed if the Oedipus complex is given centrality (Butler, 2002). I do not follow these interesting lines of thought further as my specific focus is on Freud's theory of time, rather than developments which follow from it, and I develop my thesis from this position.

Within the final component of the Greek canon I selected for my review, Greek philosophy, I narrowed my scope to concentrate on four Greek philosophers each of whom had a particularly strong influence on Freud: Anaximander, Empedocles, Plato and Aristotle. Freud draws on three of these philosophers to support his notions of Eros and the death drive: Anaximander's *Apeiron* provides, I suggest, the source of

Freud's notion that death is the price we pay for life; Plato's Eros provides Freud with the counter to the death drive, and in Empedocles' principles of Love and Discord, Freud finds validation of the drives which he claims underlie all human phenomena of which one of the most fundamental is surely the phenomenon of time. The lack of Aristotle's influence on Freud's theory of time is important, too, for I believe it indicates the different focus of psychoanalysis from philosophy: on minds rather than mind.

On the Presocratics generally, Jonathan Barnes' excellent *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Barnes, 2000) was invaluable, especially his chapter entitled 'Science and Speculation' which promotes the view that both observation and speculation were essential to those Greek philosophers' way of thinking. I extended this observation to include Freud as a particularly 'Greek' thinker: his similar, liberal use of analogy, empiricism and speculation was an anachronism for nineteenth century science but is very much in evidence in his speculations about the origins of time.

On Anaximander, I make the claim that his fragment, *To Apeiron*, to which Freud refers in *Totem and Taboo* (Freud, 1913b, pp. 153 – 154), had a significant bearing on Freud's theory of time. I benefited from the interpretations offered by Burnet (Burnet, 1920, p. 3), Barnes (2000, p. 36), Kahn (1960) and Seligman (1962) and, in a wider context, Nietzsche's writing about the fragment in his unfinished *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* (Nietzsche, 1962). Heidegger wrote an essay on the fragment (Heidegger, 2003), comparing his own translation with that of Nietzsche; and Derrida evaluates Heidegger's reading in terms of the nature of *adikia*, or injustice, from which he claims all other laws derive (Hodge, 2007). I found no work examining Freud's reading of Anaximander, that we emerge from the *apeiron* in some way tainted by that act of emergence and at the price of an inevitable return to it and I believe to have made a contribution to the literature in showing that Freud's notion that life is a debt we must repay, and, to a certain extent, his notion of the death drive itself, are both attributable to his reading of Anaximander.

Freud found pleasing similarities between Empedocles' theory of the duality of love and discord and his own theory concerning the dual drives of Eros and destructiveness. The literature on the connections between Empedocles and Freud tends to summarise Freud's references to Empedocles and to locate the references in

Empedocles' own work (for example: Arkin, 1949; Walsh, 1981; and Armstrong, 2005). My thesis does something different in its identification of Freud's point of departure from Empedocles and in elaborating Freud's theory of the drives in terms of how their interplay provides the rhythm from which the phenomenon of time can emerge.

Plato is the third philosopher whose influence on Freud's theory of time I examine. William Guthrie, whose six volume opus, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, I found particularly helpful, says this of Plato in his volume on *The Earlier Presocratics and Pythagoreans*: "A mature religious thinker like Plato may choose [myth] deliberately, and as the culmination of reasoned argument, to communicate experiences and beliefs, the reality and cogency of which is a matter of conviction outrunning logical proof. This is genuine myth and its validity and importance are undoubted (Guthrie, 1962, p. 2). I saw this evidence of a "mature thinker" in Freud's use of myth and my thesis develops the idea that Freud does not use Plato's theory of time at all; instead, he turns to the myth to which Plato gives voice in his *Symposium* (or *Dinner Party*), a dialogue to do with the nature of love.

There is very little evidence on how much Plato Freud actually read. In his paper, 'Empedocles and Freud, Heraclitus and Jung' (Tourney, 1956), Tourney claims that Freud was an "avid" reader of Plato (Tourney, 1956, p. 110). The source for his claim is Volume I of Jones' biography. But the page to which Tourney refers tells us instead that Freud remarked in 1933 that his knowledge of Plato was "very fragmentary" (Jones, 1972, p. 62). I tracked Jones' memory of the remark to a hearsay recollection recorded in a paper by Dr Siegfried Bernfeld, a member of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society: 'Freud's Scientific Beginnings' (Bernfeld, 1949). My discussion of Plato's influence on Freud was made from the standpoint that Tourney's claim appears wrong and Jones' and Bernfeld's claims unreliable hearsay.

There is surprisingly little literature on Plato's influence on Freud. Pfister wrote an early, very short and uninspiring paper: 'Plato: A Fore-Runner of Psycho-Analysis' (Pfister, 1922), which suggests Plato was a prophet for Freud in his emphasis on the power of Eros. Plass has written two papers: one on Plato, Freud and jokes (Plass, 1972); the other on Plato, Freud and, largely, anxiety (Plass, 1978). Both are rather

limited and neither makes any mention of time or drives. Simon's paper, 'Plato and Freud—The Mind in Conflict and the Mind in Dialogue' (Simon, 1973), is more illuminating in its review of the similarities between Plato's and Freud's models of mind, and the differences between them: in particular, the inevitability of conflict in Freud's model as opposed to Plato's "yearning" to eliminate conflict (Simon, 1973, p 118). Again, no reference is made to temporality. The best summary of the Platonic influence on Freud is to be found in *Apprehending the Inaccessible: Freudian psychoanalysis and Existential Phenomenology* (Askay and Farquhar, 2006, pp. 59 - 71). The point is well made there that, in addition to the acknowledged and unacknowledged direct influences of Plato on Freud, there is an indirect influence, too: Plato influenced to a significant extent the philosophical systems of the romantics and of Schopenhauer and these, too, contributed to Freud's insights (Askay and Farquhar, 2006, p. 71). Askay and Farquhar, however, make no reference to Plato's influence on Freud's theory of time. On Plato's and Aristotle's influence on Freud, the principal contemporary contributor to the literature is Jonathan Lear. Lear's *Happiness, Death and the Remainder of Life* (Lear, 2000) looks at desire in Plato, Aristotle and Freud but does not address temporality. And this absence appears to be the rule: I found the literature on the connections between Greek philosophy and Freud's theory to be slim; and, on its influence on Freud's theory of temporality, the literature is silent. My contribution in this respect therefore develops new ground.

This first part of the literature review has looked at psychoanalytically inclined work which I found provided the best contribution to the understanding and development of those aspects of the ancient Greek canon which are within the scope of my thesis. Of those reviewed, two are particularly close to the interface with works on Freud's theory of time and timelessness: Armstrong's *A Compulsion for Antiquity: Freud and the Ancient World* (Armstrong, 2005); and Vernant's and Vidal-Naquet's, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1988). On the first, Armstrong's contribution has immense academic breadth, covering not just ancient Greece but Freud's other classical, Biblical and Middle Eastern influences. My contribution follows from a much narrower but perhaps deeper focus on one aspect of the past into which Freud reached: the ancient Greek; and one aspect of the metapsychology he developed as a result: his theory of time. Vernant's and Vidal-Naquet's *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, out of all the works I reviewed, was



undoubtedly the best in terms of its scholarly coverage of the canon and its analysis of Freud's use of it. I therefore find myself in a bind because of the implication which follows from Vernant's critique of Freud: that nothing meaningful can be said about Freud's use of the myth and tragedy genres. His message is that a positive portrayal of Freud in this respect would betray a lack of understanding of the source Vernant thinks Freud plundered. I suspect that Jean Vernant would not accept that there is an interface between his discipline and Freud's. My thesis claims that there is and that the classics discipline is impoverished if it is really the case, as Vernant puts it, and as I mentioned above, that: "Freud's interpretation of tragedy in general and Oedipus Rex in particular has had no influence on the work of Greek scholars. They have continued their research just as if Freud had not spoken" (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1988, p. 93).

The second part of this review follows from the predication of my thesis on the observation that there remains an absence in the literature of a systematic account of Freud's theory of time, an absence identified by Sabbadini (Sabbadini, 1989, p. 305) and André Green (Green, 2002, p. 4; and Green, 2009, p. 1). In identifying the lack, Sabbadini and Green position themselves as contributors to its remedy and Sabbadini identifies two further exceptions to the general point he makes about the failure in psychoanalysis to provide an account of time: Hartocollis and Arlow. These four are members of a slightly larger group whose contributions I have selected on the basis that they constitute the significant literature on Freud and temporality.

The first major work on Freud's theory of time, still renowned as a classic paper, was published at the very end of Freud's life by Marie Bonaparte as 'Time and the Unconscious' (Bonaparte, 1940). Bonaparte's paper is one usually rather reverentially referred to in any psychoanalytic writing on time. Hartocollis goes so far as to credit the paper alongside Freud's own work as "a landmark in its own right" (Hartocollis, 1974, p. 244). Pollock goes further still, telling us that it is Bonaparte herself who distinguished the three aspects of 'timelessness': that the unconscious has no knowledge of time; is unaffected by the process of time; and does not perceive time (Pollock, 1971, p. 441). These aspects of timelessness had, of course, already been made clear by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud, 1920, p. 28).

For me, the value of Bonaparte's paper lies in its record of her discussions with Freud on time. The paper itself seems otherwise rather woolly. Bonaparte asserts that those who come to consciousness too early are likely to be haunted by the idea of time slipping away: "Those who exhibit a predisposition to obsessional neurosis have come, prematurely as it were, into the possession of their ego, and with it, of a sense of the flight of time. They have been allowed to experience time, as the almost boundless void which it appears in childhood, for a shorter period than their fellow-creatures, with the result that their unconscious instinctual life has risen in revolt. Throughout their whole life it will continue to exhale gusts of timelessness which will affect even their adult sense of time" (Bonaparte, 1940, p. 442). Bonaparte, whose mother died shortly after giving birth to her in 1882, seems to have identified with these people. Her childhood visit to a dying woman provided her with the knowledge of the "dread inexorable law that we must die" (ibid, p. 448). But, although personal experience may provide the hypothesis for a theory, it cannot validate it. Bonaparte's "gusts of timelessness" remain unexplored and we learn no more about Bonaparte's claim that there is an age or developmental stage before which the exposure to the idea of death pushes us into conscious thought too early, nor about her idea that "we destroy time from the moment we begin to use it" (ibid, p. 431). Bonaparte goes on to give, as purported proof of the "lethal significance" of time, our personification of time but not of space. But she offers nothing to support her argument that the concepts we personify have lethal significance. Finally, Bonaparte erroneously suggests that philosophers loathe and thus suppress the idea of time (ibid, p. 454), managing to canter over the philosophies of time of Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Spinoza, Kant and Bergson in the space of a few paragraphs, concluding that philosophy is the "occupation par excellence of the crazy creature man so often is" (ibid, p. 483). As a technical contribution to the psychoanalytic discourse on time, Bonaparte's paper is, I think, of limited value. That said, there is significant value in the paper's record of Freud's views about time, provided a qualification about their accuracy is borne in mind. Freud wrote to Bonaparte after the publication of her paper to say that: "Your comments on "time and space" have come off better than mine would have - although so far as time is concerned I hadn't fully informed you of my ideas" (Freud, 1938a, p. 455). That qualification made, I was able to establish that some of the points Freud made to Bonaparte as recorded in her paper were also

covered in their contemporary correspondence and I develop from this analysis a better and, I believe, a new understanding of Freud's theory of time as a consequence.

After Bonaparte, little is said about Freud's theory of time until Lacan brought attention to Freud's temporal notion of the *après-coup*, the importance of which was acknowledged by French psychoanalysts in particular. The concept has become what Green describes as a fundamental theoretical axis of psychoanalytic practice in France (Green, 2002, p. 7). I suggest that Lacan does not, however, provide a close reading of Freud's theory of temporality, instead developing his own theory of time which is contained in his paper, 'Logical time and the assertion of anticipated certainty' (Lacan, 2006). This paper captures what Lacan takes to be the component moments of logical time: the instance of the glance; the time of understanding; and the moment of concluding. Lacan's use of the prisoner's dilemma, as elegantly expounded by Derek Hook in 'Logical time, symbolic identification, and the trans-subjective' (Hook, 2013), and by John Forrester in his *The Seductions of Psychoanalysis: Freud, Lacan and Derrida* (Forrester, 1990, p. 178 et seq), serves to provide a logical analysis of the (variable) time it takes for us to draw inferences based on our subjective interactions with others. In Lacan's view, the time for understanding can be seen to take place between psychoanalytic sessions, hence his controversial punctuated endings, to which Lacanians still adhere, described by Sabbadini as a "gross distortion of the analytic atmosphere and [a] persecutory manipulation of the patient's freedom" (Sabbadini, 1985, p. 311) and opposed also by Jean Laplanche (Laplanche, 1999, p 32) and André Green (Green, 2002, pp. 165 - 166)<sup>6</sup>. Lacan does not seem to provide an analysis of the nature of time itself nor of Freud's theory of it but instead his own interpretation of what happens *during* time. Further, there seems to be an inherent incompatibility between Lacan's view that the unconscious is structured like a language with Freud's view of the unconscious. The unconscious is not *like* language or anything else: Freud insists on a negative reading of the timeless processes of the unconscious so that they can only be understood in terms of what conscious processes are not (Freud, 1920, p. 28; and Freud, 1933, p. 73). Language

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<sup>6</sup> The Société Psychanalytique de Paris still feels it necessary to guard against the possibility of Lacanian interruptions. This is from their website: "It is essential for the interpretive elaboration of the transference, that nothing said by the patient, who must be protected by the fundamental rule, pushes the analyst to respond by an action, such as abruptly ending the session or otherwise modifying the setting" (<http://www.spp.assp.fr/Spp/Presentation/index.htm> (accessed 22/02/2012)).

brings with it tenses which imply the temporal order that Freud is adamant is lacking in the unconscious. André Green and Jean Laplanche share the view that Lacan's formulation of the unconscious is incompatible with that of Freud. Green says: "[W]hen you read Freud, it is obvious that this proposition [of the unconscious being structured like a language] doesn't work for a minute" (Green, 1999, p. 24). And Laplanche, replying to the question: "can one speak of temporalisation in respect of the unconscious?", says: "I stand by Freud's general formulation on this. [...] I am completely against Lacan's formulation that the unconscious is structured like a language which means that in some way it is temporal too. I think that it is completely atemporal" (Laplanche 1992, p. 26, as cited in Johnston, 2005, p. 134). The incompatibility of Lacan's view of the unconscious with that of Freud together with Lacan's failure to consider how we develop a notion of time from Freud's perspective led to my conclusion that Lacan does not address the elements of Freud's temporality which are central to my investigation.

Laplanche develops his own theory of time in *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis* (Laplanche, 1976), *Seduction, Translation and the Drives* (Laplanche, 1992) and *Essays on Otherness* (Laplanche, 1999a). These works see Laplanche locate the Other as an essential component to both consciousness and time and provide a critique of Freud for failing to acknowledge and account for the necessary role of the Other in the development of our idea of time. My reading of Freud, however, suggests that there is significant otherness in Freud's theory of time. I hope to contribute a counter to Laplanche's view by developing the idea that an essential component to Freud's theory of time follows from Freud's understanding of the importance of the loss and refinding of attachments to people.

Paul Ricoeur also makes other people an essential part of his notion of time. Ricoeur provides a scholarly account of the development of Freud's metapsychological theory in *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (Ricoeur, 1970), identifying the potential conflict between, on the one hand, Freud's accounts of the mind being dominated by forces and, on the other, accounts where it is meaning being negotiated rather than energy. He emphasises the correlative connections between time, consciousness and reality (Ricoeur, 1970, p. 76, footnote) and the fact that negation, explicitly connected by Freud to the death drive, is a property of consciousness and

temporal organisation, not the unconscious (Ricoeur, 1970, pp. 314 – 315). The scope of Ricoeur's work is so vast that he is unable to provide the level of detail that I attempt in my focus on one particular aspect of Freud's metapsychology, temporality, on which I bring to bear some of Freud's correspondence, too, something which Ricoeur does not do.

In his *Time and Narrative* volumes (Ricoeur, 1983; 1985; 1998), Ricoeur concludes that narrative is a condition of our temporal existence and only through narrative can we attempt to represent our experience of time. In Volume II of *Time and Narrative*, for example, Ricoeur examines certain works of Virginia Wolfe, Hermann Hesse and Marcel Proust to show how narrative can capture some of the richness of time through narrative's own temporal structure, analysing the different temporal aspects of narration: the time of narrating; narrated time; and the temporal experience of the time between the two. Ricoeur's interest in temporality makes him exceptional amongst philosophers with an interest in psychoanalysis. Sebastian Gardner, as a contemporary example, does not address time in his exploration of the place of consciousness in psychoanalytic theory (Gardner, 1993). *The Analytic Freud: philosophy and psychoanalysis 2000*, a volume of collected papers edited by Levine (Levine, 2000) looks at the psychoanalytic contribution to certain philosophical issues of mind. It contains only one essay dealing with time, Marcia Cavell's short chapter, 'Keeping Time: Freud on temporality'. Cavell traces the structural development of Freud's theory generally and introduces her own idea of temporal fault lines: "From some growing concerns about the reliability of memory, Freud was led to the view that, as I would put it, temporality is constitutive of the mind, and further more, that the mind can be split along fault-lines that are temporal in character. He calls the process through which the split may be healed, *remembering, repeating and working through*" (Cavell, 2000, p. 85, her emphasis). Cavell notes that these temporal splits are not the same as the structural divisions which Freud draws between id, ego and superego that Freud makes in *The Ego and the Id*. But she omits consideration of Freud's important assertion made throughout his works that we should not take structural divisions to be anything other than notional (Freud, 1900, pp. 536 -537; Freud, 1917b, pp. 294 – 296; Freud 1925b, pp. 32 – 33; and Freud, 1939, pp. 96 – 97). Freud's account of time is much more subtle than Cavell's chapter provides.

André Green has done most, in my opinion, to take forward the literature on Freud's theory of time, in particular, Green's 2002 work, *Time in psychoanalysis: some contradictory aspects* (Green, 2002). Here Green laments the absence of psychoanalytic focus on time, suggesting that, even when temporality is considered, it tends to be that of the familiar and accessible linearity of the life cycle which Freud describes in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (Freud, 1905b). What tends to get overlooked, according to Green, are Freud's concepts of non-unified time, as experienced in dreams, in *Nachträglichkeit*, in the repetition compulsion, which is the main theme of Green's book, and in negation. Green adds two notions of his own: anti-time, that is, the illusion we have of being able to stop time; and the murder of time which takes place as a result of the death drive at work in the repetition compulsion. In this, Green distinguishes himself from Freud who took the death drive to be the pull to return to inanimate matter (Green, 2002, p. 78).

Green continues his complaint that modern psychoanalysis fails to appreciate the many different temporal paths of the psyche in the chapter he contributes to Siorini's and Canestri's *The experience of time: psychoanalytic perspectives* (Siorini and Canestri, 2009), a volume which seeks to highlight certain polarised aspects of time and of which Green's chapter is the most pertinent. Green's chapter is entitled 'From the ignorance of time to the murder of time. From the murder of time to the misrecognition of temporality in psychoanalysis'. In this chapter, Green adds the concept of exploded time to the ideas of anti-time and murdered time which he introduced in *Time in psychoanalysis: some contradictory aspects* (Green, 2002). Green takes exploded time to be the normal structure of temporality which follows from the assumption that we all have experiences which, because they are repressed, cannot be represented. These experiences "inevitably succumb to the work of the negative because they are linked to prohibitions that no longer permit them anything but an unconscious survival unavailable to memory or, more profoundly, removed from any form of consciousness or representability except in their raw expression" (Green 2009, p. 17). The ideas of exploded time, anti-time and murdered time are part of Green's inspirational account of the different temporal currents flowing through the psyche, the temporal process a precariously balanced activity of "jumping from one axis to another, seeking above all not to allow a current to develop in the psyche which might overwhelm it by reactivating a trauma or by reviving the desire

to transgress what is forbidden” (Green, 2002, p. 61). Where I hope to add to Green’s contribution is in my account of the other side of this coin: not the murder of time but the birth of time, that is, the process by which Freud thought we acquire a notion of time. This aspect of my contribution similarly adds to the literature on the pathological destruction and distortion of time for Green is not alone in suggesting that our sense of time can be distorted or even disappear in pathological states. Bion made the point in his theory of thinking that if a baby cannot tolerate the frustration of an absence, of the breast now being here, now, then time and space are treated as something to be destroyed. Bion writes of a patient “who said over and over again that he was wasting time—and continued to waste it. The patient's aim is to destroy time by wasting it. The consequences are illustrated in the description in *Alice in Wonderland* of the Mad Hatter's tea-party—it is always four o'clock” (Bion, 1962, p. 307). And Herbert Rosenfeld specifically identified the role of the death drive in removing the capacity to think clearly (Rosenfeld, 1971, p. 169), something which, although Rosenfeld does not state this, seems to reflect a loss of temporal structuring:

The patient appears to be withdrawn from the world, is unable to think and often feels drugged. He may lose his interest in the outside world and want to stay in bed and forget what had been discussed in previous sessions. If he manages to come to the session, he may complain that something incomprehensible has happened to him and that he feels trapped, claustrophobic and unable to get out of this state. He is often aware that he has lost something important but is not sure what it is. The loss may be felt in concrete terms as a loss of his keys or his wallet, but sometimes he realizes that his anxiety and feeling of loss refers to having lost an important part of himself, namely the sane dependent self which is related to the capacity for thinking (Rosenfeld, 1971, p. 175).

Feldman develops the notion of the death drive’s attack on mental functions in his paper, ‘Some Views on the Manifestation of the Death Instinct in Clinical Work’ (Feldman, 2000), again not explicitly referring to time but I think it follows that the fragmentation of temporal categories of past, present and future is a consequence of the general attack on mental functions. The theme of time being something we can destroy is one which Otto Kernberg considers in his paper, ‘The Destruction of Time in Pathological Narcissism’ (Kernberg, 2008). Kernberg compares the sense of life being lived where significant investment is made in intimate relationships, work and society with the sense when, in the absence of such investment which is symptomatic of pathological narcissism, the “experience of life lived shrinks, and life itself may

seem to be near its end, accompanied by a frightening sense of the brevity of time lived” (Kernberg, 2008, p. 300).

The literature, especially that of André Green, does, then, focus on what can go wrong with our sense of time; but it does not seem to address the origins of that sense of time in terms of Freud’s theory of how we develop a sense of past, present and future.

André Green's ideas are very much in evidence in the work of Rosine Perelberg. Perelberg has written papers and collected others where temporality is the predominant theme (Perelberg, 2003; 2007a; and 2007b). In her book, *Time, Space and Phantasy* (Perelberg, 2008), Perelberg takes time, space, phantasy and sexuality to be "completely intertwined" (Perelberg, 2008, p. 2). In so doing, however, Perelberg faces the danger of making such a close connection of what are different concepts: entanglement and the consequential difficulty of separating the concepts out. Thus, in taking forwards the idea implicit in Freud that loss is an essential component in the process by which we develop an idea of time, Perelberg's account seems to get caught up in contradiction. At the outset, she claims that loss creates the space from which time follows: "It is in the space created by the absence of the object that a sense of time is instituted and the activity of phantasy takes place" (Perelberg, 2008, p. 1). But soon afterwards her account reverses the order and it seems to be time which underlies and structures the capacity to bear loss from which mental space follows: "The capacity for mental space is ultimately connected to the capacity to bear the separation from the internal parents, which is inserted in the dimensions of absence, of waiting and of time" (ibid p. 21). Perelberg devotes only five pages to her analysis of Freud's notions of time, of which nearly half constitutes extracts from Freud (ibid, pp. 25 - 30). Perelberg's strengths for me lie in her elucidation of Green's work, not of Freud's, and so, whilst her contribution to psychoanalytic writing about time is undoubtedly an important one, it is not one which I found to be directly relevant to my thesis.

Birksted-Breen is another important contributor to the literature on time, both in terms of elaborating Freud’s theory and in terms of putting forward her own. In ‘Time and the *après-coup*’ (Birksted-Breen, 2003), she elaborates Freud’s concept of ‘isolation’ in terms of the sadistic phantasies of certain of her patients in slicing body parts; where sessions and the intervals between them are sliced into frozen instants, the



associative links being cut away. Birksted-Breen develops this concept through Bion's notion of the attack on linking (Bion, 1959), suggesting that: "The attack on linking is an attack on time, the link between the parents which brings the next generation, the link between patient and analyst which generates the next interpretation, the link between one moment and the next, one session and the next, which enables a process of development to take place" (Birksted-Breen, 2003, p. 1510). Birksted-Breen also introduces her own concept of 'reverberation time', an extension of Bion's notions of maternal reverie and containment, and which constitutes 'our most primitive and subjective sense of time which exists in the back and forth between mother and baby and which, on introjection, allows development of the infant's own sense of time (Birksted-Breen, 2003, p. 1505). Birksted-Breen continues to explore the concept of reverberation time in two later papers: 'Reverberation Time and the capacity to dream' (Birksted-Breen, 2009); and 'Taking time: the tempo of psychoanalysis' (Birksted-Breen, 2012). In these papers, Birksted-Breen suggests that internalisation of reverberation time lies at the heart of the experience of dreaming and takes place, too, in the analytic encounter, the analyst containing material which the patient cannot yet tolerate. This idea of rhythm is also in evidence in Sabbadini's paper, 'Boundaries of Timelessness. Some Thoughts about the Temporal Dimension of the Psychoanalytic Space' (Sabbadini, 1989). Sabbadini's paper develops the literature in its provision of a perspective on the space in which psychoanalysis takes place: the room; the areas around the room; and the space in between sessions. Sabbadini suggests that these spatial elements cannot be differentiated from the temporal ones: the waiting room is the space where the time for waiting passes; the patient leaving the room at the end of a session represents the departure from both analytic space and time. By indicating the formal temporal rules which govern the analytic setting, of beginnings and endings, frequency and breaks, rules almost exclusively controlled by the analyst, Sabbadini is able to contrast these controlled temporal boundaries with the timeless atmosphere of the analytic encounter, suggesting that it is this paradoxical contrast of temporalities which shapes the encounter, providing the rhythm for the session and the punctuation for its discourse. Birksted-Breen's notion of reverberation time and Sabbadini's notion of rhythm in the sessions both fit well with Freud's notion of discontinuity, which is a key component of his theory of time. Neither Birksted-Breen nor Sabbadini, however, develop Freud's own important notion of rhythm, something inherent in his

suggestion that time is constituted by a discontinuous engagement with the world. I emphasise this aspect of Freud's theory of temporality in what follows.

A connection *has* been made in the literature, however, between the discontinuity constituted by the beats of a rhythm and the sense of time which develops from the rhythmic feeding relationship between mother and child. Early on in the literature, for example, Sybille Yates suggests that our notion of time is established, for better or for worse, through the rhythmic feeding relationship with the mother: "where there is gross disharmony between the child's and mother's time, a degree of aggression is aroused which influences all subsequent time relationships, first excretory, then genital and then passing on to the relationship of work and pleasure and to sublimations as a whole" (Yates, 1935, p. 354). If the feeding relationship goes well, the gaps in between feeds promote a sense of temporal perspective; that something good has happened before and can be expected to happen again, the expectation being an active process which gives a sense of mastery. Where things do not go well, a pathological response can occur, illustrated by patients with a dissynchronous relationship between their own time and that of the world and experienced as a desperate need to control time. Yates explicitly connects the development (and tolerance) of ideas of time and duration to the nature of the intervals between the infant's needs and their gratification. Enid Balint makes a similar claim, persuasively arguing that there is a correlation between the infant's perception of time and perception of space: the infant's perception of the intervals between feeds provide the framework for the later perception of space between objects. If the time-lags between feeds are perceived as horrid and empty then space will be seen in a similar light; if open and friendly then so much the better for the infant's later perception of space between objects (Balint and Balint, 1959). Gifford continues this theme, suggesting that our perception of time originates as part of our gradual adaptation to innate biological rhythms, of sleeping at night and wakefulness in the day, rhythms which are not autonomous but fully responsive to the influences of our experience of maternal responsiveness to our instinctual needs (Gifford, 1960; and 1980). The literature does acknowledge, then, the rhythmic nature of our engagement with the world and connects this with the feeding relationship from which so much follows. But it does not go further back in Freud's theory to his notion of another rhythm, that

of our discontinuous perception of stimuli from the world, an aspect of Freud's theorising to which I give particular emphasis.

Earlier I referred to the claim made by Andrea Sabbadini that only Arlow and Hartocollis have explored themes of temporal significance systematically or originally (Sabbadini, 1989, p. 305). This final section of my review looks at the contributions of Arlow and Hartocollis. Arlow has written three papers to do with time: 'Disturbances of the Sense of Time—With Special Reference to the Experience of Timelessness' (Arlow, 1984); 'Psychoanalysis and Time' (Arlow, 1986); and 'The End of Time: A Psychoanalytic Perspective On Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries*' (Arlow, 1997). Each paper provides a wealth of clinical and literary material to illustrate how our experience of time is shaped by our sense of self, affect, phantasy and our ideas about death. Arlow, for example, illustrates a phantasy that we can control time, to the extent of denying its passage, through one of his patients who claimed: "If time could be made to stand still, nothing would ever change. There would be no advance toward death; life would be one perpetual pleasant afternoon" (Arlow, 1984, p. 31). Arlow's contribution, for me, lies in the clinical material he presents to illustrate how we experience time. Arlow does not, however, provide any elaboration of Freud's own thoughts of time nor any explicit connection of his material to Freud's theory.

Peter Hartocollis is the other author referred to by Sabbadini as having bucked the trend in writing about time. Hartocollis brought together a selection of his papers from 1972 to 1983 in *Time and Timelessness or the Varieties of Temporal Experience* (Hartocollis, 1983). Hartocollis develops his own theory of time, based on certain of the ideas of William James and Henri Bergson, concentrating on experiential time, that is, something akin to Bergson's idea of "lived" time, as opposed to what Hartocollis calls rational or "thought" time" (Hartocollis, 1972, p. 93; Hartocollis, 1974, p. 243). Hartocollis places affect within a temporal framework, taking anxiety to be the consequence of the ego's perception of a future, avoidable, danger with depression experienced when the ego perceives reality as having an unavoidable aspect, "finality being the essence of the past" (Hartocollis, 1972, p. 95). Boredom is the halfway house, where the sense of inadequacy of the ego in the face of a traumatic event cannot be projected into the future, to be experienced as anxiety, or the past, to

be experienced as depression. If consciousness becomes dominated by affect, the sense of time increases to the point where awareness of time becomes lost (Hartocollis, 1975). Hartocollis looks at the connection between time and affect in ageing (Hartocollis, 1976) and in borderline disorders (Hartocollis, 1978) and, more recently, like Sabaddini, at time in the psychoanalytic situation (Hartocollis, 2003). His section on the frequency and length of psychoanalytic sessions (Hartocollis, 2003, p. 941 et seq) examines counter-transferential issues and concludes that: "[t]he use of the couch and the analyst's location out of the patient's range of vision facilitate free association, which, in turn, brings into play the element of time in both its components: that of duration—the experience of time as moving, slowly or fast, or standing still; and time as perspective—present, future, or past, inherent in the phenomenon of transference" (Hartocollis, 2003, p. 956). The emphasis of the contribution by Hartocollis, like Arlow, is on the phenomenology of time, something which seems to be a common trait in North American writings on time. This is the focus, too, of William Meissner's *Time, Self and Psychoanalysis* (Meissner, 2007), *The Sense and Concept of Time in Psychoanalysis* (Abraham, 1976), Daniel Stern's *The Present Moment in Psychotherapy and Everyday Life* (Stern, 2004) and *Dimensions of Psychotherapy, Dimensions of Experience*, a collection of contributions by North American psychotherapists on time, space, number and states of mind (Stadter and Scharff, 2005). The importance of the phenomenological aspects of time is undoubted: but the works which concentrate on these aspects provide a description of our *experience* of time, rather than an account of the logically prior *acquisition* of time, a relatively unexplored aspect of Freud's metapsychology which I address fully in my thesis.

Of the literature I reviewed, the French school seems to engage most with Freud's theory of time, often seeming to use it as a springboard for the development of new theories of temporality, for example, Lacan's logical time, Laplanche's insistence of the inclusion of the Other in any theory of time and Green's notions of exploded time, anti-time and murdered time. Green is inspirational in identifying the complex temporal currents which flow through Freud's model of mind and, of all the contributors to the debate, has, in my opinion, done most to illustrate the complexity of Freud's model of temporality. British psychoanalytic writing on time appears much more limited than the French, rich, instead, in the provision of spatial

metaphors for psychoanalytic concepts. And the focus of the Northern American contribution seems to be on the phenomenological aspects of temporal experience rather than the abstract notion of time itself. Overall, my review indicated that the lack in the literature identified by André Green and Andrea Sabbadini of a consolidated account of Freud's theories of time and timelessness remains a real one. There is nowhere a full account based on Freud's theory of how we develop time, although good literature on how we can destroy or damage time. And there is nowhere a connection of the influence of the Greek canon on Freud's theory of temporality. What follows is my two-fold contribution to the literature: my analysis of the importance of the Greek canon as an influence; and, through this analysis, the provision of the currently lacking systematic account of Freud's theory of time.

## GREEK MYTHOLOGY: FROM CHAOS TO TRAGEDY

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We know that in myths the gods are granted the satisfaction of all the desires which human creatures have to renounce (Freud, 1932a, p. 189).

It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of Greek mythology for Freud. Narcissus, Oedipus and Eros play central parts in psychoanalytic theory with other mythological characters – Zeus, Kronos, Prometheus, Medusa and Ariadne, amongst others – also making their way into Freud's theorising. In this chapter, I look principally at the importance to Freud's metapsychology of time of the myths surrounding the Greek divine dynasty: from the spontaneous emergence of Chaos and Gaia through Uranus and Kronos to Zeus. I selected these myths on the basis that their material contains many themes of temporal relevance: incest, the displacement of fathers, the reversal of birth order, the overthrow of the elder generation by the younger and the enjoyment of eternal youth; these all represent aspects of a fundamental and universal phantasy in which time, including the boundary it erects between the generations, is denied. The myths' representation of the denial of time is important but I want to show that there is more of significance to psychoanalytic theory than this. My examination of Freud's use of the incestuous, murderous, cannibalistic and vengeful themes of these myths into which the phantasies and fears of the unconscious are projected, will, I hope, assist in an understanding of both the processes of the unconscious to which Freud specifically attributed the quality of timelessness; and the development of certain self-monitoring processes which Freud inextricably links to the development of an idea of abstract time. This is particularly so in the context of Freud's largely unexamined notion of endopsychology, a process which underlies both the myth-making and the time-making psychic activities.

A significant part of what follows looks at our wishes to which Freud gives immense importance. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1900), Freud makes wishes the prime psychic movers, claiming that: "nothing but a wish can set our mental apparatus to work" (Freud, 1900, p. 567). Freud demonstrates that wishes provide the motive

for our dreams whose content represents fulfilment of those wishes (ibid, p. 119; p. 121). The representation in dreams of our wishes as fulfilled involves a temporal twist: a repression of the optative ‘*if only* this would happen’ and a replacement of it with the straightforward, wish fulfilling, present tense: ‘*it is happening*’. As Freud puts it: "The present tense is the one in which wishes are represented as fulfilled" (Freud, ibid, p. 535).

Freud posits two psychical forces: one which constructs the dream wish; the other which censors. As admission to consciousness lies only through the censor, dream thoughts escape censorship through the disguise afforded through the distortion of dream work. The distortion varies: in adults, “the stricter the censorship, the more far-reaching will be the disguise” (ibid, p. 142). Thus: “*a dream is a (disguised) fulfilment of a (suppressed or repressed) wish*” (ibid, p. 160, Freud's emphasis). It is the repressed wishes from childhood lurking in the first system whose fulfilment is opposed by the second. These most basic of wishes consist of three types, all seeming to represent a denial of time: the wish to return to childhood (ibid, p. 245); the wish for life after death (ibid, p. 254); and the wishes to overthrow our father and become our mother's partner in his place (ibid, p. 263). Later, Freud added cannibalism and the aggressive desire for revenge to these wishes for eternal youth, immortality, incest and parricide (Freud, 1927a, p. 10). These wishes form the principal themes of the Greek myths of the origins of the gods, confirming Freud's view that we project into the gods the desires which we have had to renounce (Freud, 1932a, p. 189).

Works on myth by two of Freud's most important followers were both premised on Freud's notion that at the heart of every dream is a repressed wish which requires interpretation. In correspondence with Karl Abraham, prior to Abraham's publication of ‘Dreams and Myths: A Study in Race Psychology’ (Abraham, 1913), Freud confirmed that myths, like dreams, represent repressed wishes. Freud wrote: "I believe there is room for a  $\psi$  explanation, because, after all, the ancients only projected their phantasies onto the sky" (Freud, 1908d, p. 30). A little later, he wrote: "I am more and more convinced that you are right and we share the honour of resolving mythology. Cheers!" (Freud 1908e, p. 54). There is a similar sense of shared endeavour with Otto Rank who not only printed a dedication to Freud in his 1914 book, *Myth of the Birth of the Hero* (Rank, 1959), but also added this personal

handwritten dedication to Freud's copy: "Dedicated to the father of this book in thanks from – the mother" (Davies and Fichtner, 2006, p. 40).

Whilst dreams are unique to the dreamer, Freud saw myths as representing a more universal wish fulfilment, myths representing the "distorted vestiges of the wishful phantasies of whole nations, the *secular dreams* of youthful humanity" (Freud, 1908a, p. 15, his emphasis). Myths are out in the public domain, like the creative activities of literature (Freud, 1908a) and jokes (Freud, 1905d). Their external arena might make myths appear different from the dreams and phantasies which are peculiar to the dreamer or phantasiist, and which may well cause shame, rather than enjoyment, if made public. But myths, like other creative activities, share a common core with dreams in their fulfilment of wish fulfilment. Thus, Freud confirmed that the interpretative function of psychoanalysis can be applied to myths, too (Freud, 1901, p. 685). The enticement of a myth, as for jokes and creative writing, is the bribe of pleasure to be drawn from the presentation of our phantasies, the enjoyment of the release of mental tension: something Freud talks of as an 'incentive bonus', or 'fore-pleasure' (Freud, Chapter IV, 1905; and Freud, 1908a, p. 153). The incentive bonus of myths is the chance to enjoy our phantasies without self-reproach or shame and the universal popularity of myths may to some extent be explained by their representation of the component parts of our primal phantasies: of the primal scene; of seduction; of castration, in addition to the wishes for eternal youth and immortality. The Greek myth of origins seems to provide a collective vehicle into which these universal phantasies can be projected, shared and enjoyed, and through the framework of which questions to do with origins and enquiries of a similarly temporal nature can be explored. The framework of the Greek myths of origins provides the context for what follows: my elaboration of Freud's unexplored notion of 'endopsychic' myths; and my examination of his ideas on the relationship between time and reality.

Hesiod's *Theogony*, a poem written at the end of the eighth century BC, situated the gods of the Greek myths within the order of a genealogical system. Hesiod describes primeval Chaos as being the first god to emerge spontaneously, followed by Gaia (Earth), Tartarus (the underworld) and Eros (Love). He catalogues the dynasty of Uranus and Kronos from which Zeus emerges as ruler of the Olympians, populating his world through incest and rape. Freud cites Hesiod twice (Freud, 1905b, p. 57; and



Freud, 1932a, p. 188) and Jacob Burckhardt's *Griechische Kulturgeschichte* [*The History of Greek Civilisation*], a significant influence on Freud, and one of the three principal works relevant to Greek mythology of the secondary Greek literature remaining in Freud's library, follows Hesiod's account<sup>7</sup>.

Hesiod's opening hymn to the muses asks a question which, in one form or another, and at one time or another, tends to preoccupy us all: one about beginnings. Hesiod's question is this:

Tell me these things, Olympian Muses, tell  
From the beginning, which first came to be? (Hesiod's *Theogony*, 114 – 115).

Freud thought that the first riddle, the "first, grand problem of life" is expressed by children in the question: "Where do babies come from?" and claims that: "We seem to hear the echoes of this first riddle in innumerable riddles of myth and legend" (Freud, 1908c, pp. 211 – 212)<sup>8</sup>. This question seems to be framed by Hesiod in his question to the muses. Their reply is that Chaos was the "first of all". I hope to show that an understanding of Chaos is of temporal relevance to psychoanalysis in two ways: first, because Chaos might represent our phantasised beginnings; second, because, on an application of Freud's concept of endopsychology, Chaos seems to represent our real perception of our own psychic beginnings, when id is all there is.

Chaos can be understood in several different ways: it can have the sense of having emerged from nothing; equally, it can take the sense of being the nothing from which things emerge. Milton, in a phrase repeated often by Bion in his elaboration of 'O', talks of Chaos in the second way, as being the "void and formless infinite" from which matter emerges. Plato describes Chaos as always "in discordant and unordered motion" (*Timaeus*, 30A4). Ovid captures this 'chaotic' sense, seeing Chaos as "a shapeless uncoordinated mass, nothing but a weight of lifeless matter, whose ill-assorted elements were indiscriminately heaped together in one place [...]. Nothing had any lasting shape, but everything got in the way of everything else"

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<sup>7</sup> Out of print but accessible at <http://archive.org/details/griechischekultu01burcuoft>.

<sup>8</sup>In a letter to Jung of 21st November, 1909, Freud writes: "Apropos of mythology: have you observed that the sexual theories of children are indispensable for the understanding of myth?" (Freud, 1909e, p. 276). Thus Freud was able to locate the child's idea of anal birth, for example, in the myth of the Cretan Minotaur: the twisting paths of the labyrinth representing the mother's bowels; Ariadne's thread representing the umbilical cord (Freud, 1933, p. 25).

(*Metamorphoses*, Book I, 8 – 11). Notwithstanding that Chaos is not the same as 'chaos', it is the concept captured by Plato's and Ovid's descriptions of Chaos in terms of their lack of organization and logical structure for which Freud reaches when searching for an analogy for the id: "We approach the id with analogies: we call it a chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations. [...] Contrary impulses exist side by side, without cancelling each other out or diminishing each other" (Freud, 1933, p. 73).

It is Freud's view that "in the unconscious every one of us is convinced of his own immortality" (Freud, 1915d pp. 289), something I discuss in Chapter Four. It seems to follow that not only is the unconscious unable to conceive of its ending but also its beginning, both in terms of acknowledgment of a time when it did not exist, and in terms of it having been brought into being by something other than itself. Freud claimed that the time of day in dreams very often stands for the age of the dreamer at some particular period in childhood (Freud, 1900, p. 409). Applying this to the myth of Chaos, who was "first of all", and given the universal quality of wishes represented through myth, Chaos might be seen to represent the phantasy of our very earliest times: not of our race but of ourselves, of a phantasised beginning like that of Chaos; of a spontaneous emergence without parental involvement. In reality, we are all necessarily temporally posterior to our parents. Chaos seems to represent a denial of this logic; a wish that we came into being under our own steam.

Beyond this phantasy of our beginnings, it is also consistent with Freud to claim that the mythological representation of Chaos affords us a glimpse of how we dimly perceive the workings of our otherwise inaccessible and timeless unconscious. I make this claim in the context of Freud's largely unexamined concept of endopsychology. This idea, that myths are a projection not only of unconscious material but also of the perception of the unconscious itself, is raised first by Freud in an early letter to Fliess:

Can you imagine what "endopsychic myths" are? The latest product of my mental labour. The dim inner perception of one's own psychic apparatus stimulates thought illusions, which of course are projected onto the outside and, characteristically, into the future and the beyond. Immortality, retribution, the entire beyond are all reflections of our psychic internal [world]. Meschugge? [*Mad?*] Psycho-mythology (Freud, 1897e, p. 286).

Freud, then, is making two important points. First, that myths originate from within. This is in accordance with the view expressed to Abraham in the letter referred to above that “the ancients only projected their phantasies onto the sky” (Freud, 1908d, p. 30). The second component of Freud’s notion of the endopsychic status of myths, is that we are in some way able to perceive the inner workings of our mind, that these perceptions give rise to “thought illusions”, and that these thought illusions are projected into myths. Freud’s line of thought that we are able to perceive the inner workings of our mind, and project these perceptions into myths, is continued in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*:

I believe that a large part of the mythological view of the world, which extends a long way into the most modern religions, *is nothing but psychology projected into the external world*. The obscure recognition (the endopsychic perception, as it were) of psychical factors and relations in the unconscious is mirrored—it is difficult to express it in other terms, and here the analogy with paranoia must come to our aid—in the construction of a *supernatural reality*, which is destined to be changed back once more by science into the *psychology of the unconscious*. One could venture to explain in this way the myths of paradise and the fall of man, of God, of good and evil, of immortality, and so on, and to transform *metaphysics* into *metapsychology* (Freud, 1901, pp. 258 – 259, his emphasis).

This idea that we are somehow able to perceive our psychic workings appears throughout Freud’s work and Freud explicitly connects this perceptive ability with the development of a notion of time. In the ‘Project’, Freud suggests that the  $\omega$  neurones, those which he hypothesised give rise to conscious sensations, are somehow able to monitor their own level of cathexis with the results of this self-monitoring expressed in our sensations of pleasure and unpleasure (Freud, 1950, p. 312). In less neurological terms, Freud positions an attentive agency between the unconscious and preconsciousness in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1900), the censor I mentioned earlier, which keeps an eye on the nature of the material to be permitted access to consciousness. He writes of the censoring agency: “The probable relations of this self-observing agency, which may be particularly prominent in philosophical minds, to endopsychic perception, to delusions of observation, to conscience and to the censor of dreams can be more appropriately treated elsewhere” (Freud, 1900, pp. 505 – 506). A footnote added to this section in 1914 refers to Section III of ‘On Narcissism’ (Freud, 1914c) for this more appropriate treatment. Here, Freud discusses the formation of an ego ideal, an embodiment of the critical and aspirational

voices of parents and, later, society. He claims that a psychical agency relentlessly observes the ego, monitoring it to see if it matches up to the narcissistic perfection of the ego ideal: where its impulses are found wanting, the ego is criticized and repression takes place; where its exacting standards are attained, satisfaction follows. It is a combination of this agency of observation plus the ego ideal itself which will become the superego. What Freud calls the "time-factor" seems to develop alongside this agency of observation and judgment:

I should like to add to this, merely by way of suggestion, that the developing and strengthening of this observing agency might contain within it the subsequent genesis of (subjective) memory and the time-factor [*Zeitmoments*], the latter of which has no application to unconscious processes (Freud, 1914c, p. 96, footnote).

The ego's ability to judge and be judged, to be both subject and object, is an essential part of Freud's theory of melancholia. In expressive and well known terms, Freud claims that, in a melancholic reaction to loss, the real lost object is interred, becoming part of the ego to then be judged: "Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object " (Freud, 1917b, p. 249). I discuss the timeless process of melancholia a little later. Here, I want to note that it is the development of the agent of judgment which seems to bring the time-factor with it. Similarly, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud suggests that we monitor the workings of our system Pcpt-Cs, too, and he again makes an explicit connection of this ability to our development of an idea of time:

Our abstract idea of time seems to be wholly derived from the method of working of the system Pcpt-Cs and to correspond to a perception on its own part of that method of working (Freud, 1920, p. 28).

Finally, in his posthumously published 'Findings, Ideas, Problems', Freud's entry for August 22, 1938, reads: "Mysticism is the obscure self-perception of the realm outside the ego, of the id" (Freud, 1938e, p. 300) suggesting another aspect of the ability to observe the otherwise inaccessible unconscious.

Freud's concept of endopsychology thus contains within it the idea that we can monitor our psychic processes, a monitoring ability which I have shown lies behind both the myth-making activity and the psychic activity from which we develop a

notion of time. I want to show, too, that it is consistent with Freud to claim that, if the ego ideal develops with the time factor, then an idea of *shared* time comes into being with the time of creation of the first myth. For Freud claims that it was on the creation of the first myth by the first epic poet that the first monitoring agency, the ego ideal (the forerunner of the superego), was brought into being.

Freud identifies the point at which individual members of a group achieved the move from group psychology to individual psychology in a lengthy postscript to *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (Freud, 1921a). The move takes place on the creation of the first myth by the first epic poet: the myth of the hero who kills the father of the primal horde. Freud introduces the notion of the primal horde, and the murder of the father, in *Totem and Taboo* (Freud, 1913b), something I discuss in more detail in the next chapter. This father is exalted as the Creator, the ideal of each of his sons, honoured but feared and eventually killed by them, cut into pieces and devoured. Smaller, similar groups then formed, each with a father but now one whose rights were limited by the other fathers. Freud puts forward the hypothesis that one individual, longing to be the primal father, lord over all as his father was, uses his imaginative powers to achieve this position.

It was then, perhaps, that some individual, in the exigency of his longing, may have been moved to free himself from the group and take over the father's part. He who did this was the first epic poet; and the advance was achieved in his imagination. This poet disguised the truth with lies in accordance with his longing. He invented the heroic myth. The hero was a man who by himself had slain the father—the father who still appeared in the myth as a totemic monster. Just as the father had been the boy's first ideal, so in the hero who aspires to the father's place the poet now created the first ego ideal (Freud, 1921a, p. 136).

The first epic poet used his imagination to create the myth which allowed him (and it is a male for Freud) to leave the group psychically but to retain his place in it in reality. The heroic deeds that the epic poet relates are his own but his listeners, sharing the same longings, can identify themselves with the hero whose deeds the poet relates. Freud specifically connects the development of an *internal* ego ideal with the process of monitoring and observation which initiates our sense of time. It follows, I think, that, although Freud makes no explicit reference to time in this context, the first epic myth, in its provision of the first *external* ego ideal, provides a container for shared time or group time.

In Chapter Four, I examine the monitoring process in more detail to see how Freud thought an abstract notion of time might arise from it. In this chapter, I want to conclude that it is in accordance with Freud to find in Chaos an excellent example of an endopsychic myth in its representation of a projection of the hazy perception we have of the timeless workings of the id. Like the id, Chaos cannot be fully understood or explained, hence the difference between being Hesiod's "first of all", that is, something created from nothing, or being Milton's "void", that is, the nothing from which created things emerge. Chaos is always represented as operating without the governance afforded by the principles of *space*. If we take account of Freud's theory that it is an important task of dreamwork to translate temporal relations into spatial relations (Freud, 1900 p. 408; and Freud, 1933, p. 26), then Chaos might afford us insight into how we dimly perceive the id, which operates without the governance afforded by the principles of *time*.

Gaia, primordial Goddess of the Earth, emerges immediately after Chaos.

Chaos was first of all, but next appeared  
Broad-bosomed Earth, sure standing-place for all  
The gods who live on snowy Olympus' peak....  
(Hesiod's *Theogony*, 116 - 119).

Unaided, Gaia conceives and gives birth to Uranus, God of Heaven, whom she then takes as her lover. The Greeks seemed to have asserted that the male is the sole source of life; the female its container (Guthrie, 1965, p. 59). Aeschylus has Apollo confirm that analysis:

The woman you call the mother of the child  
is not the parent, just a nurse to the seed,  
the new-sown seed that grows and swells inside her.  
The man is the source of life – the one who mounts.  
The woman becomes only the receptacle  
(Aeschylus, *The Eumenides*, 665 – 669).

In the next chapter, I examine Freud's views on the envious response to the gift of life (a gift which Freud locates in the mother, not the father). Here, I observe that, in Uranus' birth, and his later incestuous union with his mother, there is no father to whom Uranus needs to be grateful for the gift of life, no-one to prohibit his access to his mother. Gaia is a mother who can satisfy all of her child's needs and the firstborn

male god can ask the question “where did I come from?” without his mother’s answer making reference to a relationship from which he is excluded. Uranus’ incestuous relationship with his mother suggests that this first generation of Greek gods represents the projection of the phantasy in which knowledge of the parental relationship is denied and the child’s incestuous relationship with the mother is an exclusive one. It was incest, after all, which prompted Freud to assert that: “We know that in myths the gods are granted the satisfaction of all the desires which human creatures have to renounce” (Freud, 1932a, p. 189). The myth represents the fulfilment of the renounced desire; the repressed wish to take one’s mother as one’s partner.

Beyond the incestuous theme, however, is the representation of a phantasy of something that has been lost forever, namely the initial stage in our development where we are solely under the sway of the pure pleasure principle, the mother/infant dyad forming a unity which Freud argues, in the context of the provision of good enough maternal care, permits the infant for a short time to assume that his or her needs are being met automatically (Freud, 1911b, p. 219). Underlying the incestuous wish, then, is the phantasy that there is no delay, that no time passes between the emergence of a wish and its fulfilment. From this perspective, the myth of Gaia and Uranus might represent a projection of our very early wishes to be (re)united with the mother; the projection of a phantasy in which the mother meets all of her baby’s needs. I suggest that the phantasy is formed and repressed after knowledge of the mother’s partner intrudes, a suggestion supported by Burckhardt in his *Griechische Kulturgeschichte* [*The History of Greek Civilisation*]. In this influential resource for Freud, Burckhardt claimed that the progression of the divine dynasty from Uranus through his son, Kronos, to Kronos’ son, Zeus, was only ever imaginary: a back story for Zeus; a similar backwards projection of an incestuous mother/son relationship, which was understood to be fictional even by those who believed in Zeus (Mitchell-Boyask, 1984, p. 31). If this is right, it supports the claim that the phantasy of an exclusive relationship with the mother, as Uranus has with Gaia, represents a denial of something lost forever at the time of creation of the phantasy.

Loss is one of the key components of reality testing, a process governed by the reality principle which bring with it consciousness and temporal organisation. Freud

confirms in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* that reality-testing is the search to *refind* a lost object: “There are thus good reasons why a child sucking at his mother's breast has become the prototype of every relation of love. The finding of an object is in fact a refinding of it” (Freud, 1905b, p. 222). The refinding entails three important components: a process of dealing with incoming stimuli; a memory store against which the incoming data can be matched; and, if we are to avoid hallucination, an acceptance of loss, that the object we are looking for is not here now. I discuss the importance of all three components of the reality-testing process to Freud's theory of time in much more detail in Chapter Four. Here, I provide a broad summary of the process to emphasise the temporal importance of loss.

For the baby, the experience of satisfaction which follows a feed temporarily placates the internal stimulus of hunger. The perception of the satisfying object is stored as a memory which remains associated ever afterwards with the excitation produced by the need. Each time the need arises, the baby seeks to re-establish the first satisfaction, impelled to seek “a repetition of the perception which was linked with the satisfaction of the need” (Freud, 1900, p. 566). This impulse to repeat is a wish. And the wish is fulfilled if the perception reappears. In ‘Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning’ (Freud, 1911b), Freud confirms that initially the baby's psychic life is governed solely by what will become known as the pleasure principle. The pleasure principle dictates the quickest path to wish fulfilment: from, say, hunger pangs to cathexis of the perception of the satisfying object through hallucination (Freud, 1950, part 1; Freud, 1900, p. 565 et seq; and Freud, 1911b, p. 219). The aim of this primitive thought activity is to establish the reconnection, produce a ‘perceptual identity’; repeat the perception linked to the satisfaction of the need. The wished-for object appears as an idea. The baby's failure to distinguish between ideas, that is, the memory or idea of a wished-for helpful object, and a perception of the helpful object in reality, leaves the ego open to injury because satisfaction will not follow the hallucination (Freud, 1900, p. 565 et seq; and Freud, 1911b, pp. 219 - 221). The bitter experience of failure to satisfy internal needs through hallucination initiates a change in psychic function, one whereby an appreciation of what is *real* takes precedence over what is *pleasurable*. Freud describes the developmental step required to effect this new principle of mental functioning, which temporarily renounces pleasure whilst account is taken of reality,



as “momentous” (Freud, 1911b p. 219) and claims that the religious myth of reward in heaven for renunciation of pleasure during life represents nothing more than “a mythical projection of this revolution in the mind” (ibid), another example of Freud’s notion of the endopsychic process.

The adaptation to the external world which involves the incorporation of the reality principle is premised on loss. To test reality, we must acknowledge that the object is really lost, even temporarily, rather than hallucinate its presence; we need to distinguish between our cathected memory of the desired object and our perception which currently lacks the object. The reality testing process is thus a search to refind something lost, to attend to the stimuli from the outside world to see if, within them, a match can be made with the memory of the lost object.

In ‘On Negation’, Freud makes loss a precondition for reality-testing and refinding the lost object its aim:

[The first and immediate aim [...] of reality-testing is not to *find* an object in real perception which corresponds to the one presented, but to *refind* such an object, to convince oneself that it is still there. [...] [I]t is evident that a precondition for the setting up of reality-testing is that objects shall have been lost which once brought real satisfaction (Freud, 1925d, pp. 237 – 238).

The example Freud provides of the lost object in the ‘Project’ is the mother’s breast (Freud, 1950, p. 328). Acknowledgment of loss introduces temporal structure in that it permits an idea of the future being different from the present in the anticipation of satisfaction on the mother’s return. Where a sufficient level of loss can be tolerated, then all is set for the reality testing process: the ego can inhibit the hallucination of the mnemic image which coincides with the wished-for object; and delay the pleasure principle’s push for immediate satisfaction so that a periodic sweep of incoming stimuli can be made to see if a match can be established with what is already cathected in memory.

What happens when loss cannot be so tolerated? Freud addressed our different reactions to loss at a meeting of the Vienna Psycho-Analytical Society on 30<sup>th</sup> December 1914 and then in his seminal paper on loss: ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ (Freud, 1917b). He showed that our response to a significant loss can be one of successful mourning, the painful path to a temporally-based conscious understanding

that the object which was there once, in the past, now is not and never will be again; or one of melancholia, an unconscious process, which has a timeless quality in its endless search to refind the lost object through unconscious identification with it. Mourning, where loss is acknowledged, in a sense, creates the past. Melancholia fails to acknowledge time for, in trying to become what we cannot refind, to be what we once had, we deny the passage of time which takes us further and further away from our lost objects. Mourning and melancholia begin in the same way, through unconscious detachment of libido from the lost object. This period of detachment is lengthy and painful as, before the ego is free: "[e]ach single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hyper-cathected, and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it" (Freud, 1917b, pp. 244 – 245). During the process, we prolong the existence of the lost object psychically and suffer "a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity" (ibid, p. 244). There are times when we refuse to abandon our libidinal attachment, maintaining it through hallucination but, in mourning, the process proceeds slowly but unhindered through the preconscious to consciousness: thus, we know who and what it is that we have lost and the search to refind the lost object can eventually come to an end as reality-testing facilitates conscious acceptance that the object is lost forever. The freed libido can then be displaced onto a new object. In melancholia, on the other hand, the libido withdraws into the ego to establish there an *identification* with the abandoned/abandoning object. The lost object is interred, and then attacked, in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to satisfy the unconscious wish that the lost object has been refound. The identification with the lost object gives rise to a double bind identified by John Steiner in his paper, 'The Conflict between Mourning and Melancholia' (Steiner, 2005): the sufferer believes that, if the object dies, she must die too and, conversely, to survive, the reality of the loss of the object must be denied. The pain of living in this bind is captured by Freud's comparison of melancholia to an open wound (Freud, 1917a, p. 253).

There is another bind identified by Freud to which some of us are subject, too, where anticipation of future loss affects our ability to enjoy the present. Freud's essay 'On Transience' (Freud, 1916a), records Freud's summer walk with two companions, one of whom, a poet, felt despondent at the thought of the decay to which all the

surrounding beauty was doomed. Freud suggests two things: that the denial of the reality of transience is clear evidence of our wish for immortality; and that it is the transience of what is beautiful which gives it its value: "Transience value is scarcity value in time. Limitation in the possibility of an enjoyment raises the value of the enjoyment" (Freud, 1916a, p 305). Noticing that he fails to convince his friends with his approach, Freud suggests that they were revolting against mourning; that their thoughts of the future loss of beauty were interfering with their present enjoyment of it.

Freud continued to revise his theory on melancholia after the publication of 'Mourning and Melancholia' in 1917. By the time *The Ego and the Id* was published (Freud, 1923a) and Freud had reconfigured the psyche in terms of the second topography, the identification process, which is such an important part of Freud's understanding of melancholia, is no longer seen as pathological but part of normal development in that our earliest losses and subsequent identifications shape the development of the ego. I believe it follows that we all suffer to some extent from an incurable wound. An important function of myths might therefore be to mitigate the melancholic reaction to our shared losses. The projection of the lost relationship with the mother into a myth permits the possibility of a universal refinding from which partial wish fulfilment can follow. The myth of Gaia, the ideal mother who forms a perfect and exclusive union with her child, permits partial fulfilment of the timeless wish to refind something which is, in reality, lost forever. The myth - indeed all myths - affords us a kind of temporal half way house, allowing us to plant one foot in the enjoyably timeless realm that myths' denial of reality requires, with the other foot planted firmly in reality, thereby avoiding the primary process hallucination of wish fulfilment, a process which is always ultimately disappointing.

The more general preservative aspects of melancholia have been taken up in some contemporary writing, in particular, that of Judith Butler (Butler, 2004). My point here is that the enduring popularity of the Greek myths might be explained by the fact that we can all return to them again and again to refind there, collectively, an element of what each of us has, in reality, lost forever. This aspect of myth might be contrasted with Greek tragedy, certain aspects of which I examine in the next chapter, for there the creative work undertaken by the tragedian and by the engaged spectator

seems more akin to the work of mourning, where loss - and guilt – can be acknowledged; and so where what is created is, in a sense, the past. There is another point to be made here. With dreams, Freud tells us an important wish of which to take account is the universal and unchanging wish of the conscious ego to sleep. Dreams are only successful if they fulfil that wish to sleep: “*Dreams are the guardians of sleep and not its disturbers*” (Freud, 1900, p. 233, his emphasis). Myths might act similarly as guardians against melancholia in their provision of a container in which our repressed incestuous, parricidal and cannibalistic wishes, wishes to do with our early and lost attachments, can be represented as fulfilled.

In his book, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (Freud, 1921a), Freud tells us that all loving relationships are ambivalent, containing elements of hostility and aversion, with one exception: the relationship which exists between mother and son (Freud, 1921a, p 101). Hostility is very much in evidence in the relationship between Gaia and Uranus because, although mother and son, it has an incestuous quality. Gaia and Uranus conceive children together (the Centimani, the Cyclops and the Titans) and the strain of Uranus' dual role as both hostile partner and jealous sibling is evident in his treatment of their children, each of whom he forces to remain within Gaia's body.

As soon as each was born, Ouranus hid  
The child in a secret hiding-place in Earth  
And would not let it come to see the light”  
And enjoyed this wickedness” (Hesiod's *Theogony*, 160 - 164).

Gaia cannot bear this and eventually decides that one of her children must ambush Uranus next time he comes to lie with her. Gaia now plays the part of Uranus' hostile partner, not loving mother: the objective of the ambush is Uranus' castration.

Vast Earth, being strained and stretched inside her, groaned.  
And then she thought of a clever, evil plan.  
Quickly she made grey adamant, and formed  
A mighty sickle, and addressed her sons (Hesiod's *Theogony*, 162 - 165).

Gaia invites her children to castrate their father and it is Kronos, the youngest son, who agrees to the act; his elder siblings are too scared to speak. When Uranus comes next to lie with Gaia, Kronos comes out from his hiding place and castrates his father

using the 'saw-toothed scimitar', the 'great long jagged sickle' which Gaia made specially for the purpose. He flings his father's severed genitals into the sea: where drops of blood fall on the Earth, the Furies later emerge, one act of violence initiating another; where, in the sea, "white foam surrounded the immortal flesh", Aphrodite later makes her appearance.

Kronos' castration of his father initiates the succession of the second generation of the Greek gods. The mythical account seems to effect a consequent generational shift in our identification: "His Majesty the Ego, the hero alike of every day-dream and of every story" (Freud, 1908a, p. 150) moves away from an identification with Uranus, and a representation of the phantasy in which the father's existence is denied, down a generation to an identification with Kronos, the mother's favourite. The father's existence is now acknowledged, but in hostile terms, and the mother becomes complicit with the child in her instigation of a shockingly aggressive act against the father.

Freud makes his first reference to Kronos in *The Interpretation of Dreams*:

The obscure information which is brought to us by mythology and legend from the primaeval ages of human society gives an unpleasing picture of the father's despotic power and of the ruthlessness with which he made use of it. Kronos devoured his children, just as the wild boar devours the sow's litter; while Zeus emasculated his father and made himself ruler in his place (Freud, 1900, pp. 256 – 257).

Freud makes an unusual mistake here: he brings forward a generation the castrating son, from Kronos to Zeus. He diligently analyses and corrects his error a year later in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (Freud, 1901, pp. 217 - 218) (adding by way of footnote that the Orphic creation myth does indeed see Zeus castrate Kronos).

Freud provides an interesting analysis of his mistake based on his own generational positioning. As Young aptly puts it: "Freud's own family constellation was multi-generationally confused" (Young, 2001, p. 30). Gay's biography provides the detail: "When Jacob Freud married Amalia Nathansohn, his third wife, in 1855, he was forty, twenty years older than his bride. Two sons from his first marriage – Emanuel, the elder, married with children of his own, and Philipp, a bachelor, lived nearby. And Emanuel was older than the young, attractive stepmother whom his father imported from Vienna, while Philipp was just a year younger. It was no less intriguing for

Sigmund Freud that one of Emanuel's sons, his first playmate, should be a year younger than he, the little uncle" (Gay, 1998, p. 5). Freud relates that a visit to England resulted in his getting to know Emanuel better. "My brother's eldest son is the same age as I am. Thus the relations between our ages were no hindrance to my phantasies of how different things would have been if I had been born the son not of my father but of my brother. [...] It is to the influence of the memory of this same brother that I attribute my error in advancing by a generation the mythological atrocities of the Greek pantheon. One of my brother's admonitions lingered long in my memory. 'One thing', he had said to me, 'that you must not forget is that as far as the conduct of your life is concerned you really belong not to the second but to the third generation in relation to your father'" (Freud, 1901, pp. 219 – 220). Despite the correction in 1901, Freud goes on to assert twice more that Kronos was castrated by his son (Freud, 1926b pp. 211 - 212; and Freud, 1938b, p. 278. Schneck, who spots the quasi-error only in Freud's 'Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence' (Freud, 1938b), suggests that it is based on either the unlikely possibility that Freud had access only to a different account of the myth from that usually relied upon (which is what Freud's 1901 footnote hints at) or that Freud relied on his memory which deceived him: "A special desire and effort to reinforce his views could have led to his false recollection of mythology" (Schneck, 1968, p. 693). Freud's own analysis seems more persuasive and fits well with the temporal theme in its acknowledgment of the impact of generational confusion.

Freud highlighted the following passage in his volume of Burckhardt's *Griechische Kulturgeschichte* [*The History of Greek Civilisation*], using a double line, a form of marking he rarely used: "Misery and evil in human existence begins with the great sin in the divine world, the castration of Uranus by Cronos" (Mitchell-Boyask, 1984, p. 31). What are we to make of Freud's double underlining? It seems to me that Freud would not want to stress the sinful aspect of the deed – after all, Freud thought myths to be a projection of wishes which, because they are unconscious are amoral ("The id of course knows no judgements of value: no good and evil, no morality" (Freud, 1933, p. 74)). Rather, I think that Freud's underlining highlights the importance he attributed to what he took to be the real original sin: the murder of the primal father by the primal horde. Freud would have taken the castration of Uranus by Kronos to be a mythological representation of the real killing of the father, the

deed from which man's sense of guilt derives and which is repeated in cultural representations such as myth and tragedy. I discuss this further in the next chapter.

Uranus' incest with his mother and Kronos' castration of Uranus were such shocking deeds for Socrates that he suggests in Plato's *Republic* that, if education were to become the concern of the state, these myths should be at the top of the censor's list: "[T]here is first and foremost the foul story of Ouranos and the things Hesiod says he did, and the revenge Cronos took on him. While the story of what Cronus did, and what he suffered at the hands of his son, is not fit as it is to be repeated to the young and foolish, even if it were true" (Plato's *Republic*, 375 – 381). Socrates' censor would prevent the spread of knowledge of the divine deed whereby a son castrates his father. Freud positions a similar censor within the psychic structure, between the unconscious and preconscious systems, to prevent unconscious wishes from forcing their way by way of the preconscious system into consciousness (Freud, 1900, p. 568). I referred earlier to Freud's understanding that these wishes include the wish to overthrow our father (Freud, 1900, p. 263) and the aggressive desire for revenge (Freud, 1927a, p. 10), both of which can be seen represented in the myth of Kronos' castration of his father. The censor is another example of the monitoring agencies which Freud connects to the development of a notion of abstract time. Freud attributes the provision of the censor to the preconscious system in "The Unconscious", (Freud, 1915c). This system, which I discuss fully in Chapter Four, is responsible for the censor, reality-testing and temporal ordering (Freud, 1915c, p. 188). Freud seems to be making a direct correlation between the repression of primal wishes, the acknowledgment of reality and the development of an abstract notion of time. Again, this suggests that myths occupy a special place in the temporal scheme of things for, in permitting the expression of wishes which are otherwise to be censored, myths are placed within time, their contents given temporal ordering having taken on some of the timeless quality of their source.

Freud made two uses of the Kronos myth in his discussions of the relationship between father and son: first, in his notion of the primal horde, which I discuss in the next chapter; second, in the context of the castration complex. The castration complex, an integral part of the Oedipal scenario, emphasises the point I made in my discussion of Gaia: that is, that loss plays an important role in our formation of a

notion of abstract time. Without an acknowledgment of loss, reality and time cannot be established. The Kronos myth permits examination of the distinction to be made between loss and lack in Freud's theory, a distinction which permits the inference that time seems to have a gendered dimension.

Although Freud often assumes a parallel development of the sexes (Freud, 1900, p. 57; Freud, 1921a, p. 106; Freud, 1923a, p. 32; Freud, 1925e, p. 36), he also makes it clear that the assumption of an analogous path is mistaken (for example: Freud, 1925e, p. 36, footnote). By 1931, Freud is clear that male and female sexual development take different courses: "We have, after all, long given up any expectation of a neat parallelism between male and female sexual development" (Freud, 1931, p. 226)<sup>9</sup>. In teasing out Freud's thoughts on how we might come to an idea of time, I am restricting myself to Freud's unwavering view that both sexes start from the same position: girls and boys take the mother's breast as the first sexual object and the prototype for all future relationships (Freud, 1905b, p. 222; Freud, 1925c p. 251); and girls and boys attribute possession of a penis to both sexes (Freud, 1908c). It is on sight of evidence to the contrary that the developmental paths diverge, taking each sex to a different resolution of the Oedipus complex which I think permits an inference that time in Freud's theory is a gendered construct.

According to Freud, girls initially think that they have a small penis which will grow. During this pre-Oedipal stage, Freud thought that girls have a similar relationship with their father to that of a boy with his father during the Oedipus complex proper, a relationship when the girl's father "is not much else for her than a troublesome rival, although her hostility towards him never reaches the pitch which is characteristic of

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<sup>9</sup> Freud's treatment of the castration complex, and the Oedipal scenario of which it is part, has been subject to a rigorous critique for its assumed imposition of a phallogentric perspective on female sexual identity and development. Freud famously found female sexuality difficult to fathom, it being "veiled in an impenetrable obscurity" (Freud, 1905b, p. 151), and "a 'dark continent' for psychology" (Freud, 1926b, p. 212). Horney (Horney, 1924), Jones (Jones, 1927), Deutsch (Deutsch, 1930), Klein (Klein, 1928), and Lampl-de Groot (Lampl-De Groot 1928) each took serious issue with some of Freud's notions raised in his "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes" (Freud, 1925c), in particular, Freud's refusal to consider that girls may have an unconscious awareness of the vagina and the inside of the mother's body. Freud comments specifically on certain of their points in his follow-up paper six years later, on "Female Sexuality" (Freud, 1931), concluding that: "We believe we are justified in assuming that for many years the vagina is virtually non-existent and possibly does not produce sensations until puberty" (Freud, 1931, p. 233). Frosh provides an enlightening account of the dissenting views in Part III of his *The Politics of Psychoanalysis: An Introduction to Freudian and Post-Freudian Theory* (Frosh, 1999).



boys” (Freud, 1931, p. 226). Freud characteristically reaches for an Ancient Greek analogy to capture his realization of the importance of the girl’s pre-Oedipal period: “Our insight into this early, pre-Oedipus, phase in girls comes to us as a surprise, like the discovery, in another field, of the Minoan-Mycenean civilization behind the civilization of Greece” (Freud, 1931, p. 226).

Girls’ expectations of future growth, as Freud explains in ‘Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes’ (Freud, 1925c), come to an end when girls notice “the penis of a brother or playmate, strikingly visible and of large proportions, at once recognize it as the superior counterpart of their own small and inconspicuous organ, and from that time forward fall a victim to envy for the penis” (Freud, 1925c, p. 252)<sup>10</sup>. At this point, Freud suggests that the girl moves from a belief that she has a small penis which will grow to one that she lacks a penis as a consequence of having been earlier punished by castration. Notably, Freud does not ask what the girl thinks she has done wrong. It is Freud’s view that the boy fears castration from his father for wanting to take his mother as a partner. It is tempting to deduce from this that the girl assumes her father has castrated her for already having taken her mother as a partner. But there is nothing in Freud to substantiate this line of thought.

The girl’s assumption that other females possess a penis continues for a while but she later becomes aware that certain other children are in the same position, then, later still, that adult women have also been similarly punished. Freud’s view is that it is by way of comparison to boys that girls judge their clitoris to be “a wrong done to her and [...] a ground for inferiority” (Freud, 1924c, p. 178). His conclusion does not really follow: he claims that the girl envies the penis and, because of the narcissistic injury she has suffered, she nurses a profound resentment against her mother who sent her into the world so insufficiently equipped (Freud, 1925c, p. 254). But an assumed

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<sup>10</sup> Freud locates penis envy in both sexes: he sees evidence of it not only in the woman’s compensatory wish for a baby; but in the male struggle against feminine passivity: “Both in therapeutic and in character-analyses we notice that two themes come into especial prominence and give the analyst an unusual amount of trouble ... The two [corresponding] themes are, in the female, an envy for the penis—a positive striving to possess a male genital—and, in the male, a struggle against his passive or feminine attitude to another male” (Freud, 1937a, p. 250, as cited in Steiner, 1999, p. 176). Steiner convincingly argues that penis envy represents an over-valuation of masculinity which follows from our primal envy of the source of goodness offered by the breast and the mother. Defending ourselves against this envy leads to a devaluation of, and attack on, femininity.

failure of her mother to equip her is inconsistent with Freud's claim that the girl believes she has been castrated. It is not clear whether Freud believes the girl suffers from lack or loss; from privation for which the mother is to blame, or deprivation by the father.

The girl's castration complex ends when she gives up her wish for a penis and replaces it with a wish for a child: "*with that purpose in view* she takes her father as a love-object. Her mother becomes the object of her jealousy" (Freud, 1925c, p. 256, his emphasis). And so the girl enters the Oedipus complex, a secondary formation subsequent to the castration complex, and without fear of castration, the deed having already having taken place (Freud, 1924c, p. 178). This is very different from the development Freud maps for boys. Although boys, like girls, may initially ignore the difference in male and female genitalia, Freud claimed that boys' later sight of a woman's genitalia would inevitably be taken to be a perception of mutilation, evidence that the threat of castration is a real one. The boy recognizes that, if he were to persist in his longings for his parents, castration would follow. Each way he loses: to have his mother would incur castration as a punishment; to take the place of his mother and have his father would mean castration as a precondition for the feminine condition (Freud, 1924c, p. 176). Thus the Oedipus complex of boys crashes to an end with the threat of castration, one which terrorizes the boy. Myths in which castration forms a theme provide testament to the extent of this terror (Freud, 1908c, p. 217). In one of his late, posthumously published papers, Freud identifies in Medusa's head the representation of this terror and a motif for the horrifying effects of the female genitals:

The sight of Medusa's head makes the spectator stiff with terror, turns him to stone. Here we have the same origin from the castration complex and the same transformation of affect! For becoming stiff means an erection. Thus in the original situation it offers consolation to the spectator: he is still in possession of a penis, and the stiffening reassures him of the fact. This symbol of horror is worn upon her dress by the virgin goddess Athena. And rightly so, for thus she becomes a woman who is unapproachable and repels all sexual desires—since she displays the terrifying genitals of the Mother. Such a representation of woman—who frightens away owing to her castration—was inevitable among the Greeks, who were in the main strongly homosexual (Freud, 1941,

p. 69)<sup>11</sup>.

In summary, Freud has girls and boys enter and leave the Oedipus complex at different points: the girls enter their castration complex with either a lack or a past loss—Freud is not clear on which; and boys exit when their own castration complex begins with the threat of a future loss. Several points of temporal relevance arise from this mismatch. The first is to do with the attraction for both sexes to the Greek myth where a son castrates his father. Freud claims that both girls and boys make an initial attribution of a penis to both sexes and that both boys and girls feel hostile towards the father. I think that it follows that Kronos' castration of his father, Uranus, represents a satisfying retaliation: wish fulfilment of revenge by the girl, for her perceived lack or loss, and by the boy, for his perceived threat. The myth of Kronos and Uranus represents the possibility of both refinding what has been lost for girls, or might be lost, for boys, and, for both sexes, the opportunity to take eternal revenge on the parental figure representing the castrator. A further point follows from Freud's view that the resolution of the Oedipus complex is different for boys and girls. Freud describes in *The Ego and the Id* (Freud, 1923a) and 'The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex' (Freud, 1924c) that the superego emerges as a conclusion to the Oedipus complex. As Freud discusses in detail in 'Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes', for boys: "the complex is not simply repressed, it is literally smashed to pieces by the shock of threatened castration [...] the super-ego has become its heir" (Freud, 1925c, p. 257). In girls "the Oedipus complex escapes the fate which it meets with in boys: it may be slowly abandoned or dealt with by repression, or its effects may persist far into women's normal mental life. I cannot evade the notion (though I hesitate to give it expression) that for women the level of what is ethically normal is different from what it is in men. Their super-ego is never so inexorable, so impersonal, so independent of its emotional origins as we require it to be in men" (ibid).

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<sup>11</sup> A bronze statue of Athena was one of Freud's favourite items, and is now housed in the Freud museum in London. This is the statue which Freud asked Marie Bonaparte to take out of Austria, one of only three items smuggled out when his collection was threatened. HD relates in her *Tribute to Freud* that, in one of her sessions with Freud in Vienna in 1933 or 1934, he gave the statue to her to hold: "This is my favourite. [...]. She is perfect," he said, "only she has lost her spear" (Doolittle, 1971, p. 74, her emphasis).

Freud's much earlier account in 'On Narcissism' (Freud, 1914c) of the agencies which will merge into the superego, provides that the process of internalisation of parental voices of authority and aspiration is mediated through the narcissism of the perfect child we once took ourselves to be. This suggests that the girls' superego will have the masculine attributes of what she unconsciously feels she has lost; for the boy with the masculine attributes of what he unconsciously feels he might lose. The superego is one of the monitoring agencies to which I have referred several times in this chapter to emphasise their role in our development of an idea of abstract time. It might follow that, if the female superego is qualitatively different from the male, then so too will be the female way of structuring time. Of course, saying this, I remain mindful that Freud was careful to avoid making clear cut distinctions between the sexes: "[A]ll human individuals, as a result of their bisexual disposition and of cross-inheritance, combine in themselves both masculine and feminine characteristics, so that pure masculinity and femininity remain theoretical constructions of uncertain content" (Freud, 1925c, p. 258). That said, I believe Freud provides enough material to allow an inference that time in his theory is a gendered construct. This would provide support for the ideas of feminine time of, for example, Julia Kristeva (Kristeva, 1981; 1996), Luce Irigaray (Irigaray, 1985; 1998) and Judith Butler (Butler, 1990; 1993) which I do not pursue further here.

Uranus and Gaia unite to tell Kronos that, just as he overthrew Uranus, so he will be overthrown in turn by his own son. Kronos, however, "had in mind that no proud son of Heaven should hold royal rank among the gods except himself" (Hesiod, *Theogony*, 465 – 468) and so, having forced himself on his sister, Rhea, tries to avoid the prophecy by swallowing each of their children at birth. Freud refers several times to Kronos' eating of his children to illustrate that boys' fears of being castrated by their fathers is manifest in its infantile form when the father figure is represented not as castrator but as devourer (for example: Freud, 1900, pp. 256 – 257; and Freud, 1938, pp. 277 – 278). Freud's clinical assessment of boys' fears of this regressive aspect of the castration complex is in evidence in the Wolf Man case study (Freud, 1918b, p. 32). The theory is confirmed in 'Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence', where Freud clarifies not only that, through regression to the oral phase, the fear of castration transforms into a fear of being eaten by the father; but also connects the period of dependence on the mother of both girls and boys with the fear of being

devoured, suggesting a transformation of the child's oral aggression against the mother into a fear of being devoured by the father (Freud, 1931, p. 227; p. 242).

When their last son, Zeus, is born, Rhea tricks Kronos into swallowing a stone wrapped in swaddling clothes instead of the baby. Like Kronos, Zeus is the youngest son, a privileged position, as Freud confirms in *Totem and Taboo*: "For natural reasons, youngest sons occupied an exceptional position. They were protected by their mother's love, and were able to take advantage of their father's increasing age and succeed him on his death. We seem to detect echoes in legends and fairy tales both of the expulsion of elder sons and of the favouring of youngest sons" (Freud, 1913b, pp. 80 – 81). Zeus matures quickly to adulthood and then acts to fulfil the prophecy that he will overthrow his father: he poisons Kronos' drink and Kronos vomits: up comes the stone; and then Zeus' siblings, the Olympians. In this symbolic reversal of the birth order, Zeus now becomes the oldest, not the youngest, of the Olympians. This aspect of the myth suggests to me a representation of the revolution to which Freud alludes in his (only) reference to Aeschylus' *Oresteia* in *Moses and Monotheism* which I discuss in the next chapter:

Under the influence of external factors into which we need not enter here and which are also in part insufficiently known, it came about that the matriarchal social order was succeeded by the patriarchal one – which of course involved a revolution in the juridical conditions that had so far prevailed. An echo of this revolution still seems to be audible in the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus (Freud, 1939, pp. 113 – 114).

Zeus' facilitation of his siblings' second birth seems to represent this shift: from the matriarchy, represented by Gaia generally and Gaia's and Rhea's favouring their youngest sons; to patriarchy, and a new emphasis on primogeniture as the principle which governs succession. The Olympians go on to wage war on their parents, the Titans, who are beaten and condemned to spend eternity in Tartarus as one divine generation succeeds another. Zeus' sisters get nothing when Zeus and his brothers, Poseidon and Hades, divide up the world. Zeus is now leader of the Olympian horde, having toppled his father from a similar position. In Freud's words: "The strong male was lord and father of the entire horde and unrestricted in his power, which he exercised with violence. All the females were his property— wives and daughters of his own horde and some, perhaps, robbed from other hordes" (Freud, 1913b, pp. 80 – 81). True to form, Zeus proceeds to abuse his position in his peopling of his world

through incest and rape. He makes his cousin, Metis, pregnant. Zeus' grandparents, Gaia and Uranus, tell him that Metis' first child will be a girl and that, if Metis conceives again, she will have a son destined to depose Zeus just as Zeus had deposed Kronos and Kronos had deposed Uranus. Zeus goes one better than his grandfather, Uranus, who forced his children to remain concealed in the maternal body and his father, Kronos, who swallowed his children, forcing them to remain in the paternal body: rather than conceal the children, he conceals the mother who bears them: he swallows pregnant Metis, taking her into his own body to prevent the birth of a male successor, thus securing his position as unsurpassable king of the gods<sup>12</sup>.

Appendix I contains the family trees which show my understanding of the lines of incestuous descent from Chaos to Zeus and then from Zeus through to Tantalus and Cadmus, the fathers of the Houses of Atreus and Thebes. These are the houses of tragedy from which, four generations after the founders, Orestes and Oedipus will emerge, the ancient Greek tragedians' accounts of their lives providing both a narrative illusion of temporal lineage from god to hero and an illustration of the catastrophic human consequences when phantasies denying time are enacted. These tragedies are the subject of the next chapter. In this chapter, I wanted to show just how significant mythology is to Freud's theory of temporality. It plays a much larger part in Freud's metapsychology of time than the reflection it provides of our unconscious wishes and phantasies which we project "onto the sky" (Freud, 1908d, p. 30), wishes and phantasies whose temporal themes are in evidence in the myths of the divine dynasty of Chaos, Gaia, Uranus, Kronos and Zeus. I have examined Freud's notion of the endopsychic nature of mythology, particularly in the context of Chaos, where clear parallels between its spacelessness and the id's timelessness exist. I have also looked at the concept of loss and its role in the reality testing process which Freud thinks underlies our notion of abstract time (Freud, 1925d, p. 231), claiming that the Greek myths of the origins of the gods allow us to refind, over and over,

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<sup>12</sup> In swallowing Metis, Zeus is also able to represent the phantasy that men can bear children. Metis, having been pregnant when she was swallowed by Zeus, makes armour for her daughter inside Zeus. Her hammering gives Zeus a dreadful headache which is relieved only when Hephaestus cracks open his skull allowing Athena to spring out, adult and armed. Zeus not only carries a goddess representing intellect; when one of his human partners, Semele (Cadmus' daughter), is 6 months pregnant, Semele, maliciously encouraged to so by Hera, asks Zeus to reveal himself, withholding sex until he does so in a storm of thunder and lightning which destroys Semele. Hera, feeling guilty, rescues Semele's foetus, sewing him into Zeus' thigh where he remains for another three months until delivered by Hera. The baby was Dionysus. The anatomical diversity of the location of babies within Zeus (and Kronos and Gaia) illustrates the representation in myth of the variety of children's theories of birth discussed by Freud in *Three Essays* (Freud, 1905b, p. 196).

something which is, in reality, lost forever. I suggested that myths might provide a half-way house: neither timeless, in that we do not need to hallucinate wish fulfilment to enjoy them, so reality need not be denied; nor totally within time, as they represent, as Freud saw it, the timeless and indestructible repressed memories from our early childhood. And I have drawn attention to the importance of our psychic monitoring processes in the development of our idea of abstract time: the censor; the evaluator of the ego as against the ego ideal; and the superego. These agencies observe our inner workings and I emphasised that Freud explicitly connected them to the development of an idea of time. These monitoring agencies assume growing importance in the next chapter as I move from a focus on the importance of Greek myths for Freud, myths in which wishes are represented as fulfilled, to a focus on the importance of Sophocles' tragedy, *Oedipus Rex*, for Freud's theory of time. The wishful 'if only!' of myths becomes the admonitory 'look what happens if' in tragedy, a nuanced tense change carrying the warning message of the catastrophic consequences which follow if we ignore the agencies to which we owe our sense of time. In this move from myth to tragedy, I correspondingly transfer my focus from the timeless and amoral id to consideration of the time-full and beleaguered ego, contrasting our enjoyment of the myths of Kronos, who castrates his father, and Uranus, who sleeps with his mother, with Sophocles' tragedy of Oedipus, who is similarly violent and incestuous, but from whom "each one recoils in horror from the dream-fulfilment here transplanted into reality, with the whole quota of repression which separates his infantile state from his present one" (Freud, 1897b, pp. 265-266). Chapter Two, then, will examine the proposition that, whilst Freud may have chosen certain Greek myths to frame some of the timeless processes of our unconscious, only Sophocles' tragedy of Oedipus would do to structure our psychic transition from a state of timelessness to one of being in time.

## TRAGEDY, GUILT AND TIME

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What grief can crown this grief?  
It's mine alone, my destiny – I am Oedipus! (*Oedipus Rex*, 1495 – 1496).

Greek tragedy was produced for performance at the festivals of Dionysus during the sixth and fifth centuries BC. It succeeded the epic myth and flourished for just over one hundred years before it made way, in its turn, to another form of making meaning: philosophy. The work of three tragedians surpassed all others: that of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. Between them, they composed between two and three hundred tragedies of which only thirty-four remain<sup>13</sup>. Four of these are the subject matter of this chapter: the three tragedies of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, in which Orestes is the tragic hero; and Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, one of Sophocles' three Theban plays. Striking similarities exist between Orestes and Oedipus yet their treatment by Freud is stark: Freud made only one reference in his entire collected works to Orestes' family yet chose to put Sophocles' Oedipus at the heart of psychoanalysis, ranking Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* one of the three great masterpieces in literature (Freud, 1928, p. 188) and making the Oedipus complex the cornerstone of psychoanalysis, its recognition the "shibboleth that distinguishes the adherents of psychoanalysis from its opponents" (Freud, 1905b, p. 226, footnote). In this chapter, I ask "Why Oedipus?", going beyond the rich biographical aspects of Freud's identification with Oedipus, which I discussed in the introductory chapter, to provide what I think is a more compelling reason for Freud's decision to put Sophocles' tragedy of *Oedipus Rex* at the heart of psychoanalysis. My discussion turns on Freud's relatively unexplored theory of how we develop a capacity for guilt. This is

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<sup>13</sup> Of the seventy or so works it is estimated that Aeschylus wrote, only seven tragedies survive: *The Persians*, *Seven Against Thebes*, *The Suppliants*, the *Oresteia* trilogy (*Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers* and *The Eumenides*) and *Prometheus Bound* (the authorship of which is disputed). Of Sophocles' works, estimated at more than one hundred and twenty, again only seven tragedies remain extant: *Ajax*; *Antigone*; *Oedipus Rex*; *Women of Trachi*; *Electra*, *Philoctetes* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. And only eighteen (or nineteen if *Rhesus* is included) of Euripides' works remain (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1988, p. 304 and p. 312).



specifically relevant to Freud's theory of temporality for, as I showed in the last chapter, Freud explicitly, albeit cautiously, suggests that the "time-factor" (Freud, 1914c, p. 96, footnote) develops hand in hand with those internal agencies whose voices of judgment produce guilt: the censor, conscience and the superego<sup>14</sup>.

I concluded the last chapter by contrasting our unsullied enjoyment of the myths of Uranus, who sleeps with his mother, and Kronos, who castrates his father, with our horrified response to similar acts of incest and violence when they are carried out by Oedipus. In this chapter, through a comparison of Aeschylus' portrayal of Orestes with Sophocles' portrayal of Oedipus, I hope to show that an understanding of Freud's theory of guilt, and the time-factor which develops with our capacity to feel guilty, explains how such similar material can give rise to such different reactions. Guilt is, I think, the critical element which differentiates tragedy from myth, Oedipus from Uranus and Kronos, and, indeed, Sophocles' Oedipus from Aeschylus' Orestes. In this chapter, I put forward the view that Freud may have privileged Sophocles' tragedy because Sophocles' portrayal of Oedipus was a sophisticated representation of the framework of mind within which guilt is an internally mediated proposition and time an emergent quality.

Notably, the material of tragedy is that of myth. As Freud puts it in 'Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming', tragedians "take over their material ready-made (Freud, 1908a, p. 149). Indeed, André Green seems to take tragedy to be a straightforward transposition of myths onto the stage (Green, 1975, p. 364). But what the tragedian does with the material taken from myth is uniquely creative. Oedipus, for example, is a mythical character but Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* is unique. Vernant and Vidal-Naquet in *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* highlight this important qualitative difference between myths and tragedy, making the point that myths rank equally whereas tragedies are unique, being "literary productions that were created at a particular time and in a particular place, and there is, strictly speaking, no parallel for any one of them" (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1988, p. 8). Aristotle, in the close

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<sup>14</sup> Bergler and Róheim suggest that the development of the superego coincides with an understanding that we cannot control time. "With the development of the superego and the yielding of fantasies of omnipotence to the encroachment of reality, the child finds out that it is, after all, under the 'command of the clock'" (Bergler and Róheim, 1946, pp. 196 - 197).

analysis of the tragedy genre he provides in his *Poetics*, suggests that the tragedians made a deliberate selection of their material from myth, choosing as their heroes those characters whose destiny is shaped by terrible things:

At first poets used to pick out stories at random; but nowadays the best tragedies are constructed around a few households, e.g. about Alcemon, Oedipus, Orestes, Meleager, Thyestes, Telephus and any others whose lot it has been to experience something terrible or perform some terrible action (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 53a21 – 25).

It is the family which bears the brunt of the horrible events: Alcemon and Orestes both avenged their fathers' deaths by killing their mothers; Oedipus killed his father and slept with his mother; Meleager and Telephus killed their uncles; and Thyestes committed adultery, unwittingly ate his children and committed incest. Edith Hall, in *Greek Tragedy*, brings out the point that the murders in Greek tragedy tend to be of family members: "Clytaemnestra kills her husband, Orestes kills his mother, Oedipus kills his father, Medea kills her children, Agave kills her son, Creon sentences his niece Antigone to death" (Hall, 2010, p. 3). But it is not just murder from which the families of tragedy suffer, it is from enactment of the phantasies of incest, revenge and cannibalism, too, that is, from the enactments of the same phantasies I examined in Chapter One in terms of their representation within myth of different aspects of a fundamental denial of time.

Different views are taken about the source of tragedy. Vernant's and Vidal-Naquet's point above, that each tragedy is unique, extends to their suggestion that to make any assumption about the origins of the tragedy genre is risky speculation. They focus instead on tragedy as an innovation expressing both internal and external developments. Thus, they describe tragedy as being both an expression of human experience "marking a new stage in the development of inner man and of the responsible agent" (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1988, p. 23); and an expression of the tension which existed between the past, represented by myth, and the present, constituted by the city state, where new ways of thinking were born together with politics and law (ibid, p. 33; p. 185).

Aristotle was more willing than Vernant and Vidal-Naquet to speculate on the origins of tragedy, suggesting in his *Poetics* that it had its roots in ancient 'dithyrambs', hymns sung and danced in praise of Dionysus and other gods. There are also

etymological explanations of tragedy's origins: one suggests that the Greek word for tragedy, τραγωδία, is a contraction of *tragos* (a male goat) and *aeidein* (to sing) so means goat song; another is that the roots of the word lie in *trygos*, the grape harvest. Freud might be seen to subscribe to the goat song theory: "In Greek tragedy the special subject-matter of the performance was the sufferings of the divine goat, Dionysus, and the lamentation of the goats who were his followers and who identified themselves with him" (Freud, 1913b, p. 156). But, in fact, Freud looks further back than this for the source of tragedy. Freud's bold contribution is that tragedy is a representation of an actual deed, the primeval tragedy a real one: that is, the murder of the primal father by his sons, an act of parricide Freud claimed was then repeated interminably in the myths, in the tragedies and in religion.

I touched on Freud's notion of the murder of the primal father in the last chapter. It is something Freud explores first in *Totem and Taboo* (Freud, 1913b), developing his ideas further in Chapter X of *Group Psychology* (Freud, 1921a), *The Future of an Illusion* (Freud, 1927a) and *Moses and Monotheism* (Freud, 1939). Freud's acknowledged sources are Frazer (whose anthropological work comparing mythology with religion analysed the ritual murder of a king by his successor and a prevention of incest through social taboos), Robertson Smith (whose work looked at the importance of sacrificial feasts) and Darwin (whose evolutionary account of our ancestors included a claim that groups were formed with a dominant male lording it over a group of females). Darwin had published his *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* in 1859, when Freud was three, and, in 1871, in Freud's last years at school, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, the German translation of which was published in 1872. Freud suggests that Darwin fails to address the question of the origin of these groups: "There is, of course, no place for the beginnings of totemism in Darwin's primal horde. All that we find there is a violent and jealous father who keeps all the females for himself and drives away his sons as they grow up" (Freud, 1913b, p. 141). Freud's contribution is the hypothesis that the sons of the dominant male in the primal group banded together to slay and devour their father, in a stroke both removing him and attaining identification with him. It is because so much stems from this primal murder that Freud feels able to confirm Goethe's line in *Faust* (Part I, Scene 3): "in the beginning was the Deed" (ibid, p161). The guilt and remorse which followed from the deed instigated two

taboos: one against killing the totem which would from then on represent the father; the other, exogamy, in a deferred obedience to their late father's prohibition of access to his women. These taboos implemented cultural barriers against parricide and incest.

They thus created out of their filial sense of guilt the two fundamental taboos of totemism, which for that very reason inevitably corresponded to the two repressed wishes of the Oedipus complex. Whoever contravened those taboos became guilty of the only two crimes with which primitive society concerned itself (Freud, 1913b, p. 142).

The brothers would then form groups of their own, this time including the primordial institutions of totemism and exogamy to provide buffers against our Oedipal leanings: behind the totem stands the father who is both loved and hated; and exogamy stands as a guard against the incestuous pull to the mother. For Freud, all later religions, morality, society and art derive from these institutions which, in turn, converge in the Oedipus complex. And this is as it should be, says Freud, given the centrality to our psychic life of the complex (ibid, pp. 156 – 157).

Freud initially struggled to interpret the representation in Greek tragedy of the guilt to which the primal deed gave rise. He describes himself to Ferenczi as “tormented by the secret of tragic guilt” (Freud, 1911c, p. 281). Freud's torment resolves when he attributes to Greek tragedy a creative and imaginative twist whereby the hero must represent both victim and murderer, suffering as the father must, but also taking on the burden of guilt from his filial murderers.

The Hero of tragedy must suffer; to this day that remains the essence of a tragedy. He had to bear the burden of what was known as ‘tragic guilt’; the basis of that guilt is not always easy to find, for in the light of our everyday life it is often no guilt at all. As a rule it lay in rebellion against some divine or human authority; and the Chorus accompanied the Hero with feelings of sympathy, sought to hold him back, to warn him and to sober him, and mourned over him when he had met with what was felt as the merited punishment for his rash undertaking (Freud, 1913b, p. 155- 156).

The chorus represents the sons and the tragic guilt is rightfully theirs. The father, represented by the hero, redeems his sons in a distorted and, as Freud suggests, hypocritical representation of the facts, taking on the burden of his sons' guilt and the responsibility for his own suffering. Hence, for Freud, the tragic nature of the hero's guilt: “The crime which was thrown on to his shoulders, presumptuousness and

rebelliousness against a great authority, was precisely the crime for which the members of the Chorus, the company of brothers, were responsible. Thus the tragic Hero became, though it might be against his will, the redeemer of the Chorus" (ibid, p. 156). I think that Freud's analysis of Greek tragedy might be extended so that the hero can be seen to take the burden of responsibility and guilt for a deed already committed not only from the chorus but from the audience, too. This adds significantly to our understanding of Aristotle's claim that tragedy is cathartic in the sense of it "effecting through pity and fear the purification of such emotions" (*Poetics*, 49b, 27f), something I touched on in the Introduction.

Freud's contribution to an understanding of the tragedy genre in terms of both his location of its origin in the primal deed and in terms of his analysis of the tragic guilt borne by the hero, is an important one. Freud's notion of tragic guilt seems to prefigure Vernant's and Vidal-Naquet's notion of the "tragic consciousness of responsibility" which they suggest emerges when "the human and divine levels are sufficiently distinct for them to be opposed while still appearing inseparable" (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1988, p. 27) and when "human action has already become an object of reflection, of internal debate, but has not yet required sufficient autonomy to be fully self-sufficient" (ibid, p. 92). Later in this chapter, I shall suggest a parallel between the emergence of this tragic sense of responsibility and the emergence of the superego which brings time with it. First, I want to explore further Freud's largely unexamined theory of how we develop the capacity for the guilt which lies behind both Freud's concept of "tragic guilt" and Vernant's and Vidal-Naquet's later notion of the "tragic consciousness of responsibility".

Freud discusses guilt principally in *Totem and Taboo* (Freud, 1913b), *The Ego and the Id* (Freud, 1923a), 'The Economic Problem of Masochism' (Freud, 1924b) and *Civilisation and its Discontents* (Freud, 1930a). He draws a subtle distinction between conscience and guilt: conscience is the "perception of the rejection of a particular wish operating within us"; whereas guilt is "the perception of the internal condemnation of an act by which we have carried out a particular wish" (Freud, 1913b, p. 68). Although Freud does sometimes use the terms interchangeably (for example, Freud, 1923a, pp. 50 – 51), it follows that conscience is to do with the rejection of wishes; guilt is to do with their fulfillment. In 'The Economic Problem of

Masochism', Freud attributes conscience to the superego and guilt to the ego, guilt arising when the ego perceives its failure to meet the superego's demands (Freud, 1924b, p. 166). Guilt and conscience therefore have these two psychic components in common: a wish; and the perception of its rejection (in the case of conscience) or enactment (in the case of guilt). In the last chapter, I drew attention to two points of temporal relevance in this connection: that Freud thought our wishes to be timeless in their indestructibility (Freud, 1900, p. 553); and that the agencies of perception of our wishes develop hand in hand with our notion of time. Chapter Four returns to these points of Freud's theory of temporality. What I want to do in this chapter is emphasize that part of Freud's theory which shows that our capacity for guilt develops with the superego which brings time with it.

In *The Ego and the Id*, where Freud elaborates his thoughts about guilt, Freud suggests that most of our sense of guilt is unconscious because of its intimate connection with the Oedipus complex, something which is itself unconscious (Freud, 1923a, p. 52). Freud, however, did not like the idea of an *unconscious* sense of guilt, finding the term "psychologically incorrect" on the basis that feelings cannot properly be described as being unconscious. He suggested, instead, an unconscious "need for punishment" (Freud, 1924b, p. 166), a term very similar to the "delusional expectation of punishment" which is symptomatic of melancholia (Freud, 1917b, p. 244). In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud finds a tyrannical superego to be responsible for this sense of guilt, or expectation of punishment (Freud, 1923a, p. 53). Sodr , through her discussion of Edmund Wilson's commentary on Sophocles' play, 'Philoctetes', *The Wound and the Bow*, draws out very well the painful and complex internal dynamics in melancholia: the suffering of the ego, darkened by the shadow of the lost object; the cannibalistic devouring of that object; and the sadistic and murderous attack made by the critical agency (Sodr , 2005).

Our unconscious sense of guilt, or need for punishment, can be so strong that it forms the motive for a crime, the punishment for the crime being sought to bring some relief from the guilt which caused the crime (Freud, 1923a, p. 52). This aspect of Freud's thinking seems similar to Winnicott's connection of delinquency with childhood deprivation (Winnicott, 2013). Both Freud and Winnicott locate the impetus for the crime in the psychological need for its consequences: Freud taking the punishment to

be a means of assuaging pre-existing guilt; Winnicott taking the crime itself to represent a means of compensation for an earlier loss (usually that of the mother's love). It follows from Freud's attribution of timelessness to the unconscious wishes which give rise to an unconscious sense of guilt that any relief through punishment is likely to be only temporary, hence, perhaps, the repetitive nature of recidivism: the endless seeking of punishment is for a crime one does not know one has committed so the punishment will never fit the crime.

In *Civilisation and its Discontents*, Freud seems unclear as to whether guilt is a sequel or prequel to the Oedipus complex. He first suggests that the sense of guilt arises only on establishment of the superego:

A great change takes place only when [parental] authority is internalized through the establishment of a super-ego. The phenomena of conscience then reach a higher stage. Actually, it is not until now that we should speak of conscience or a sense of guilt (Freud, 1930a, p. 125).

But then, a few pages later, he writes this:

We ought not to speak of a conscience until a super-ego is demonstrably present. As to a sense of guilt, we must admit that it is in existence *before* the super-ego, and therefore before conscience, too (ibid, p. 136, my emphasis).

Melanie Klein refers to both of these extracts in her paper, 'Contribution to the Theory of Anxiety and Guilt', concluding that Freud did not countenance a notion of pre-Oedipal guilt. Klein writes: "Taking [...] Freud's views as a whole [...] it is clear that he maintained his hypothesis that guilt sets in as a sequel to the Oedipus complex" (Klein, 1948, p. 115). Klein's desire to differentiate herself from Freud may have influenced her position: for she took guilt be pre-Oedipal, following from the infant's sadistic desire to devour the mother and so shaping the course of the Oedipus complex rather than emerging as a consequence of it (Klein, 1945, p. 79). Christine Ury, on the other hand, in her 1997 paper, 'The Shadow Of Object Love: Reconstructing Freud's Theory of Preoedipal Guilt', takes as her starting point the second extract above from *Civilisation and its Discontents* to claim that Freud took a sense of guilt to develop *before* the superego is established and conscience afterwards (Ury, 1997).

I suggest that there is a middle path between Klein's and Ury's polarized positions. A careful reading of Freud shows that he took our capacity for guilt to develop in two stages. The first stage, which takes place *before* the incorporation of the superego, is one where the infant's ego recognizes that that his or her deed will be met with disapproval if discovered by an *external* parental figure of authority. During this stage, the infant's sole concern is not to be found out by this external authority who might threaten a loss of love or punishment. "This [...] is the reason why it makes little difference whether one has already done the bad thing or only intends to do it. In either case the danger only sets in if and when the authority discovers it, and in either case the authority would behave in the same way" (Freud, 1930a, p. 124). The second stage, which follows the incorporation of the parental authority as the superego at the end of the Oedipus complex, is much more restrictive: guilt then becomes the ego's anxious response to the superego's frown, an *internal* response to the deed, or even to the thought of the deed, from which there is no escape. The first stage of guilt might be seen in a pre-Oedipal child who secretly eats forbidden sweets. Provided that no one finds out, the child remains secure in parental love and approval and is therefore free from guilt. The guilt of an older child, in the same situation, would depend on the reaction of his or her own superego to eating the sweets or, indeed, even thinking about eating the sweets. Whilst the younger child's guilt is contingent upon being discovered, the older child's guilt is automatic: the possibility of not being found out does not exist. Freud concludes: "Thus we know of two origins of the sense of guilt: one arising from fear of an authority, and the other, later on, arising from fear of the super-ego" (ibid, p. 127). And Freud confirms that there are two strata of the sense of guilt several pages later: "one coming from fear of the *external* authority, the other from fear of the *internal* authority" (ibid, p. 137). As the capacity for guilt develops, the question becomes not whether we will be found out but whether what we are doing – or thinking about doing - is wrong.

With this sense of Freud's two-stage theory of guilt, I want to look now at Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. My intention is to highlight and compare some important temporal points to do with law, judgment and guilt. I will suggest that Aeschylus' portrayal of Orestes represents the first stage of guilt in Freud's theory, a point in psychic development when the "time-factor" is not fully incorporated, and Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* represents the second stage, where guilt



becomes an internally mediated proposition from which there is no escape, the ever-watchful superego bringing with it the abstract notion of time lacking in the first stage.

### *Aeschylus' Oresteia*

Aeschylus' *Oresteia* was part of a tetralogy, that is, three tragedies followed by a tragi-comedy to offer light relief. The three tragedies, *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers* and *The Eumenides* remain. The tragi-comedy, *Proteus*, is lost. The family tragedy in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* centres on Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra and their three children: Iphigenia, Electra and Orestes<sup>15</sup>. Agamemnon was the King of Argos. His twin brother was Menelaus, King of Sparta. The Trojan War provides the tragedies' immediate backdrop. Outraged by the elopement of Helen, Menelaus' wife, with Paris, the son of Priam, King of Troy, Agamemnon led the Greek army into battle against Troy as an act of revenge. At the outset of the war, Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter, Iphigenia, cutting her throat in an attempt to appease the goddess Artemis and obtain favourable winds for the Greek fleet. The winds turn for the better and the fleet sets off to Troy to do battle for the next decade.

At the outset of the *Oresteia*, then, we are swept up in the potential conflicts between justice and revenge, and home and state, conflicts framed by Aeschylus within a legal context. Vernant and Vidal-Naquet confirm that the Greek tragedians used legal terminology to capture and convey some of the tensions and conflicts inherent within the growth towards autonomy, where the separate domains of religion, morality and law were becoming recognized but where the boundaries between them had not been clearly demarcated (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1988, p. 38). The questions Aeschylus asks the audience to consider include whether the Trojan War, an international act of revenge for Helen's elopement with Paris, is a just war. The Chorus tells us that it might be: "For their mad outrage/ of a queen we raped their city – we were right" (*Agamemnon*, 808 – 810). And was Agamemnon right to justify his decision, as he does below, to slaughter Iphigenia by ranking a successful outcome of

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<sup>15</sup> Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra have three children in Aeschylus' account. In other accounts, Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra have another daughter, Chrysothemis.

the war of revenge higher than the value of his daughter's life, the state of higher value than the family?

Pain both ways and what is worse?  
Desert the fleets, fail the alliance?  
No, but stop the winds with a virgin's blood,  
feed their lust, their fury? – feed their fury! –  
Law is law! –  
Let all go well (*Agamemnon*, 212 –217).

Agamemnon's decision to sacrifice his daughter seems to evidence a patriarchal bias towards the state and away from the family, something to which Freud points in his single reference to Aeschylus' trilogy, to which I refer again later, where he talks of Aeschylus echoing the move from matriarchy to patriarchy (Freud, 1939, pp. 113 – 114).

In Agamemnon's absence, Clytaemnestra takes Aegisthus, Agamemnon's cousin, as her lover, sends Orestes into exile and forces Electra to become a servant. At the end of the Trojan War, Agamemnon returns to Argos with his 'prize', Cassandra, the daughter of King Priam. Cassandra is a seer, condemned by Apollo, whose attentions she rebuffed, to tell the future to those who will not believe it. Cassandra anticipates her own and Agamemnon's murder at Clytaemnestra's hands, aptly describing in her fear the chaotic family psyche: "Murder. / The house breathes with Murder – bloody shambles" (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 1330 – 1131). The murders Cassandra predicts take place. Clytaemnestra, who has premeditated Agamemnon's death for years, coldly hacks her husband to death in his bath, then kills Cassandra. Clytaemnestra takes pride in her murder of her husband, accepts responsibility for the deed, but shows no guilt.

I brooded on this trial, this ancient blood feud  
Year by year. At last my hour came.  
Here I stand and here I struck  
And here my word is done.

I did it all. I don't deny it, no (*Agamemnon*, 1393 – 1400).  
The Chorus is appalled and suggests that Clytaemnestra should be exiled but Clytaemnestra robustly justifies her actions. Addressing Agamemnon's corpse, she claims that she is avenging Iphigenia, killing Agamemnon in the same way that he killed their daughter:

Act for act, wound for wound!  
Never exult in Hades, swordsman,  
Here you are repaid. By the sword  
You did your work and by the sword you die (*Agamemnon*, 1554 – 1558)<sup>16</sup>.

Clytaemnestra's murder of her husband exemplifies the 'eye for an eye' revenge of talion law, a law which Freud says "is so deeply rooted in human feelings, [that it] lays it down that a murder can only be expiated by the sacrifice of another life" (Freud, 1913d, p. 154). The aggressive desire for revenge on which talion law is based was identified by Freud as forming one of the most fundamental and timeless wishes of the unconscious (Freud, 1927a, p. 10), part of the group of wishes I looked at in the last chapter (the others being the wishes for eternal youth, immortality, incest, parricide and cannibalism). The Chorus drives home the logic of talion law: its circularity; its timeless bloody demands for revenge<sup>17</sup>. The questions with which the audience are now confronted are again to do with law, guilt and judgment: was Agamemnon right to murder his daughter (and commit adultery with Cassandra)? Was Clytaemnestra right to murder her husband (and commit adultery with Aegisthus)?

Talion law remains a central theme of the second play of the trilogy, *The Libation Bearers*, when Orestes has to decide whether to kill his mother to avenge the death of his father. Agamemnon's grave provides the site of reunion for Orestes, who has secretly returned from exile, and his sister, Electra. Orestes tells Electra that Zeus, through Apollo, has commanded him to avenge his father by taking the lives of their mother and her lover, Aegisthus:

'Gore them like a bull!' he called, 'or pay their debt  
with your own life, one long career of grief'

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<sup>16</sup> Pindar suggests another motive: "Was it the ritual killing of Iphigeneia at Euripus, far from/ Her homeland, That stung her to summon the anger leading to this dreadful act?/ Or was she enslaved to another's bed, seduced by nocturnal couplings" (Pindar, Pythian 11, 22 – 24). Agamemnon, whose soul Odysseus meets in Hades, has an understandably bitter reaction to his murder: "The bitch turned her face aside, and could not bring herself, though I was on my way to Hades, to shut my eyes with her hands or to close my mouth. There is nothing more degraded or shameful than a woman who can contemplate and carry out deeds like the hideous crime of murdering the husband of her youth. I had expected a joyful welcome from my children and my servants when I reached my home. But now, in the depth of her villainy, she has branded with infamy not herself alone but the whole of her sex, even the virtuous ones, for all time to come" (Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book 11, 425 – 435).

<sup>17</sup> Martin Amis explores the aspect of Islamic punishment, based on talion law, which envisages an eternal return to the guilty act in his post 9/11 collection of short stories, *The Second Plane* (Amis, 2008). 'The Last Day of Muhammad Atta' describes the minutiae of the hijacker's day, which ended when he crashed American Airlines Flight 11 into the North Tower, every ghastly last detail of which is to be relived by him forever.

(Aeschylus, *The Libation Bearers*, 277 – 279).

Agamemnon's grave also provides the site for Clytaemnestra's libations to her husband, the sacrificial offerings of milk and honey she sends as tokens of appeasement after a particularly disturbing dream. In the dream, Clytaemnestra gave birth to a snake, swaddled it and offered it her breast. But the snake then bit and tore her nipple. As Electra tells her brother: "blood curdled the milk with every sharp tug" (*The Libation Bearers*, 520). Orestes interprets the dream as a sign that he will turn serpent and kill his mother. Bolstering himself with this interpretation, and with Electra's encouragement, Orestes disguises himself and goes to the palace with his friend, Pylades, to tell Clytaemnestra, who does not recognize him, that her son, Orestes, is dead. Clytaemnestra appears undone by this news. Orestes then reveals himself, kills Aegisthus and turns to his mother, who pleads with dignity for her life.

Wait, my son – no respect for this, my child?  
The breast you held, drowsing away the hours,  
Soft gums tugging the milk that made you grow? (*The Libation Bearers*, 883 – 884)

Struck with indecision and dread at the idea of killing his mother who gave him life, Orestes turns to his companion, Pylades, to ask him what he should do. Pylades offers no space for reflection, no time to think it through; he simply refers to and reinforces the voice of Apollo. Orestes is won over.

Clytaemnestra: I see murder in your eyes, my child – mother's murder!  
Orestes: You are the murderer, not I – and you will kill yourself.  
Clytaemnestra: Watch out – the hounds of a mother's curse will hunt you down.  
Orestes: But how to escape a father's if I fail?  
Clytaemnestra: I must be spilling live tears in a tomb of stone.  
Orestes: Yes, my father's destiny – it decrees your death.  
Clytaemnestra: Ai – you are the snake I bore - I gave you life!  
Orestes: Yes! That was the great seer, that terror in your dreams.  
You killed and it was outrage – suffer outrage now.

(*The Libation Bearers*, 883 - 917).

Orestes then murders his mother. He just has time to proclaim publicly that his act was a just one, divinely sanctioned, before the Furies set upon him and Orestes rushes out, chased by the Furies whom only he can see, and the Chorus asking:-

Where will it end? –  
where will it sink to sleep and rest,

this murderous hate, this Fury? (*The Libation Bearers*, 1075-1078).

In the final play in the trilogy, *The Eumenides*, Orestes is granted a trial in Athens to establish whether he is guilty of any crime. The Furies act as Orestes' prosecution; Apollo as his defence. Athena presides over the court. Apollo first claims that, as Orestes was charged by Zeus, king of the gods, to avenge his father, he cannot be guilty. This defence is successfully challenged by the leader of the Furies, who asks how Zeus can set such store by a father's rights when Zeus has shackled his own father, Kronos, in Tartarus. Apollo then argues that Orestes was right to spurn his mother's rights in his act of revenge, that the gift of life derives from the father, not the mother.

The woman you call the mother of the child  
is not the parent, just a nurse to the seed,  
the new-sown seed that grows and swells inside her.  
The man is the source of life – the one who mounts.  
The woman becomes only the receptacle (*The Eumenides*, 665 – 669).

As I mentioned in the last chapter, the Greeks took the male to be the source of life and the female as the container for it (Guthrie, 1965, p. 59)<sup>18</sup>. Apollo points to Athena, who was born from Zeus' head, as evidence that not only can the father be the source of life but he can act as container, too, failing to acknowledge the existence of Athena's mother, Metis<sup>19</sup>. Athena confirms her agreement with Apollo's assessment of her motherlessness and casts her lot in Orestes' favour:

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<sup>18</sup> Edith Hall's *Greek Tragedy* (Hall, 2010) makes explicit some of the sexist, hierarchical and racist values at the heart of the Greek system and shows that tragedy works both to reveal and to disrupt these values. She cites the famous passage from Euripides' *Medea* where Medea provides an embittered account of women's status in the polis:

Of all creatures who breathe and have a brain  
We women are the most miserable.  
First we have to buy a husband, a master  
Of our bodies, at an extortionate price.  
The most difficult issue we face is whether we get  
A bad husband or a good one. For divorce  
Brings disgrace on a woman, and she can't refuse her husband [...]  
He goes out and relieves his vexation  
By socialising with a male friend or someone of his own age,  
While we can only resort to a single person.  
And they say that we live a danger-free life at home  
While they fight with a spear. They are wrong.  
I would rather stand three times in battle with a shield  
Than give birth a single time (Euripides, *Medea*, 231 – 5, 244 – 9 as cited in Hall, 2010, pp. 152 – 153).

<sup>19</sup> As I discussed in the last chapter, Metis was swallowed by Zeus to prevent realisation of the prophecy that Zeus would be overthrown by his son, just as Zeus overthrew his father. Metis remained active within Zeus as both partner and mother, providing Zeus with wise counsel and Athena with her

Orestes, I will cast my lot for you.  
No mother gave me birth.  
I honour the male, in all things but marriage.  
Yes, with all my heart I am my father's child.  
I cannot set more store by the woman's death –  
She killed her husband, guardian of her house.  
Even if the vote is equal, Orestes wins (Aeschylus, *The Eumenides*, 748 – 756).

The lots are counted and the votes are indeed equal. Greek law required a majority verdict for a judgment of guilt, so Athena placates the Furies and allows Orestes to walk free from the court: he has been found not guilty.

Before I move on to provide an account of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, I want to return to Freud's single reference to Aeschylus' trilogy, in *Moses and Monotheism* (Freud, 1939), made, as I indicated earlier, to illustrate the revolution in the way in which law was administered once patriarchy succeeded matriarchy. Freud's full reference is below and it shows Freud focusing on both the macro level of the revolution from matriarchy to patriarchy and the micro level of the individual who turns from mother to father:

Under the influence of external factors into which we need not enter here and which are also in part insufficiently known, it came about that the matriarchal social order was succeeded by the patriarchal one – which of course involved a revolution in the juridical conditions that had so far prevailed. An echo of this revolution still seems to be audible in the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus. But this turning from the mother to the father points in addition to a victory of intellectuality over sensuality – that is, an advance in civilisation, since maternity is proved by the senses whereas paternity is a hypothesis, based on an inference and a premiss. Taking sides in this way with a thought-process in preference to a sense perception has proved to be a momentous step (Freud, 1939, pp. 113 – 114).

Freud made similar points about maternity and paternity in two 1909 papers: 'Family Romances' (Freud 1909a) and his study of the Rat Man in 'Notes Upon A Case Of Obsessional Neurosis' (Freud, 1909c). In both papers, Freud suggests that, whilst we

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armour. Amber Jacobs' *On Matricide: Myth, Psychoanalysis and the Law of the Mother* (Jacobs, 2007) forcefully argues that Metis has been radically marginalised and that a re-reading of the ancient Greek texts ought to bring Metis back into the discussion. Freud also writes Athena's mother out of the picture in his discussion of the Rat Man where he claims that "Athena had no mother, but sprang from the head of Zeus" (Freud, 1909c, pp. 232 – footnote). Notably, however, Freud does not reach the same conclusion as the Greeks, that is, that the gift of life comes from the father. He takes the mother to be the giver of life: "The mother gave the child life, and it is not easy to find a substitute of equal value for this unique gift" (Freud, 1910b, pp. 172 – 173).

can know who our mother is, through the evidence of our senses, paternity is one of the principal subjects upon which we must remain uncertain. Interestingly, the other questions Freud suggests to which we will never have answers are all to do with time: the length of our life; whether there is life after death; and whether we can rely on our memory to tell us what happened in the past (Freud, 1909a, p. 239; and Freud, 1909c, pp. 232 – 233). In a footnote to the Rat Man study, Freud claims: "A great advance was made in civilization when men decided to put their inferences upon a level with the testimony of their senses and to make the step from matriarchy to patriarchy" (Freud, 1909c, p. 233). The irony of Freud using Aeschylus' *Oresteia* to illustrate this point in *Moses and Monotheism* is that Athena, who presides over Orestes' court of judgment, declares that she is certain of her *paternity* and has no *maternity*.

Freud describes the prioritisation of thought above senses as a "momentous step" momentous step" (Freud, 1939, p. 114). In the last chapter, I discussed another, very similar, "momentous step" identified by Freud: the incorporation of the reality principle, when the question of whether a perception is real becomes more important than whether it is pleasurable (Freud, 1911b, p. 219). What follows from the exercise of the reality principle is time. In the next section, which examines Sophocles' treatment of Oedipus, I suggest that Freud's theory of guilt incorporates a similar move: from a sense perception of external admonitory figures, to a thought-process which follows their internalisation. This move, too, constitutes a "momentous step" and, once again, what follows from it is time.

### *Sophocles' Oedipus*

Sophocles' Theban plays do not constitute a trilogy, as did Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, nor were the plays produced in the chronological order of events of the Theban saga: *Antigone* was written first, in or around 442 BC, with *Oedipus Rex* following ten or so years later. *Oedipus at Colonus* was produced in 401 BC, after Sophocles' death. The trilogy to which *Oedipus Rex* belongs did not win first prize in the city Dionysia competition for which it was entered (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1988, p. 324). Aristotle, however, took Sophocles' account of Oedipus to exemplify the perfect form of tragic composition (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 52a). And it is, according to Vernant, only Sophocles' version of the Oedipus myth which is truly tragic (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1988, p. 90). Vernant goes on rather snootily to claim that Sophocles'

tragedy is the only version of the Oedipus myth which Freud would have known, “not himself a scholar of myth” (ibid). Freud made no claims to be a classicist<sup>20</sup>. But Vernant's claim that Freud only knew Sophocles' Oedipus is plainly wrong. Freud underlined passages on almost every page of his copy of Leopold Constans' *La Légende D'Oedipe*, and the comments by Mitchell-Boyask, who examined the classical works remaining in Freud's library and analysed Freud's marks, emphasise the extent of Vernant's error:

The variety of markings in Constans's book suggest Freud carefully read and repeatedly returned to this work about the Oedipus myth and was aware of all the myth's permutations. The Oedipus he chose was the result of long and careful deliberation (Mitchell-Boyask, 1984, p. 34).

Vernant's unjustified disparagement of Freud's Greek scholarship is part of the more general attack he launches against Freud. Vernant accuses Freud of acting as if he were a latter-day Tiresias, with an assumed second sight enabling him to find meaning in the tragedy beyond that of the Greek scholar or historian who seeks to reconstruct meaning from the tragedy only through painstaking reconstruction (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1988, p. 86). Vidal-Naquet throws in a parenthetical line about what he describes as Freud's novel interpretation of the tragedy: “(There is no secret to Oedipus Rex; and to that extent Freud, fascinated as he was by the “famous decoder of riddles” was mistaken)” (ibid, p. 325). In fact, of course, Freud does not interpret the tragedy. He interprets the audience's reaction to it. Freud was a member of one such audience in 1886, at a performance of *Oedipus Rex* at the Comedie Française in Paris, and Jones tells us that the experience made a deep impression (Jones, 1972, p. 194). Only a little later, in 1897, when he writes to Fliess to tell him of progress in his self-analysis, Freud specifically connects his findings, which he believes to be of universal application, to the tragedy.

One single thought of general value has been revealed to me. I have found, in my own case too, falling in love with the mother and jealousy of the father, and I now regard it as a universal event of early childhood [...]. If that is so, we can understand the riveting power of Oedipus Rex, in spite of all the objections raised by reason against its presupposition of destiny; and we can

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<sup>20</sup> Freud goes so far as to suggest that Abraham's draft paper on Oedipus should be reviewed by a scholar before publication to check Abraham's interpretation of the meeting place of Oedipus and Laius as being a "hollow way" rather than the "crossroads" which was what Freud understood from the Greek texts known to him (Freud, 1921b, p. 447).



understand why the later ‘dramas of destiny’ were bound to fail so miserably. Our feelings rise against any arbitrary, individual compulsion [of fate]. [...] But the Greek legend seizes on a compulsion which everyone recognizes because he feels its existence within himself. Each member of the audience was once, in germ and in phantasy, just such an Oedipus, and each one recoils in horror from the dream-fulfilment here transplanted into reality, with the whole quota of repression which separates his infantile state from his present one (Freud, 1897b, pp. 265-266).

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, published in 1900, Freud gives public voice to this astonishingly revolutionary idea which will become known as the Oedipus complex. The following extract contains both Freud’s hypothesis that there is a universality of childhood Oedipal impulses and his argument that the hypothesis is confirmed by the tragedy’s universal power to move its audience.

Being in love with the one parent and hating the other are among the essential constituents of the stock of psychical impulses which is formed at [the] time [of childhood]. [...] This discovery is confirmed by a legend that has come down to us from classical antiquity: a legend whose profound and universal power to move can only be understood if the hypothesis I have put forward in regard to the psychology of children has an equally universal validity. What I have in mind is the legend of King Oedipus and Sophocles’ drama which bears his name (Freud, 1900, pp. 260 - 261).

Thus Freud can challenge the traditional view of why the tragedy has retained its power to move audiences for more than two millennia. Not, as is commonly held, because tragedy represents the contrast between divine will and human impotence. Rather, the tragedy’s power lies in its representation of the repressed feelings which form two of our most fundamental impulses and whose existence is proven by our dreams:

There must be something which makes a voice within us ready to recognize the compelling force of destiny in the *Oedipus*, while we can dismiss as merely arbitrary such dispositions as are laid down in [...] modern tragedies of destiny. And a factor of this kind is in fact involved in the story of King Oedipus. His destiny moves us only because it might have been ours—because the oracle laid the same curse upon us before our birth as upon him. It is the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father. Our dreams convince us that that is so (Freud, 1900, p. 262).

Vernant claims that Freud’s argument here is viciously circular: Freud is validating his own theory by way of reference to a text from a different age, interpreting the text through the framework of his theory and finding confirmation of his theory through that interpretation. We might counter this by reminding Vernant that Freud is not

interpreting the text but the audience's reaction to it. Vernant will not have this: in a different context, he says that any reconstruction of the audience response is only possible where account is taken of the contextual framework of the text, of the communication between Sophocles, his fifth century audience and contemporary social thought. It is there, he claims, that we will find the material of the tragedy: not in a dream (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, pp. 85 – 90). The painstaking nature of Vernant's own work makes one sympathetic to his critique of Freud. But, in the end, I think Vernant overlooks Freud's fundamental point: Freud is not seeking to locate the audience response within an historical context; he is suggesting a universality of response which by definition has no historical location.

Before looking at Sophocles' tragedy, I want to touch on its important mythical antecedents. I have made the point that Freud was well aware of these, not least from his close study of Leopold Constans' *La Légende D'Oedipe*. As with Orestes, Oedipus' mythical past is rank with violence (see Appendix II for an account). In particular, Oedipus' father, Laius, was expelled from Thebes on his own father's death and took shelter with Pelops, Orestes' great-grandfather. In a gross abuse of this hospitality, Laius rapes Pelops' son, Chryssipus. Freud double marks the discussion of Laius' rape in his copy of *La Légende D'Oedipe*, a form of marking reserved for text which seems to have had special importance. However, Freud intriguingly makes no comment about the abuse carried out by Oedipus' father in his published works, an omission which it is tempting to connect to a memory of what may have been his own father's abuse, a memory to which Freud refers in an 1897 letter to Fliess: "Hysterical cold shivers = being taken out of a warm bed. Hysterical headache with sensations of pressure on the top of the head, temples, and so forth, is characteristic of the scenes where the head is held still for the purpose of actions in the mouth. (Later reluctance at photographer's, who holds head in a clamp.) Unfortunately, my own father was one of these perverts and is responsible for the hysteria of my brother (all of whose symptoms are identifications) and those of several younger sisters" (Freud, 1897c, pp. 230 – 231). Any connection of this letter to Freud's omission of reference to Laius is, however, only conjecture and more telling is Mitchell-Boyask's claim that the exclusion by Freud of reference to Laius' crime is evidence of Freud's specific choice of Oedipus the Sophoclean hero, for this aspect of Oedipus' past is not mentioned by Sophocles either: "Freud's exclusion of Laius's homosexuality and its consequences

marks Freud's insistence on the experiences of the specifically Sophoclean hero and their implications for all individual men" (Mitchell-Boyask, 1984, p. 34).

It is Laius' rape of Chrysippus that brings down Pelops' curse on the House of Thebes and sets the sphinx off to guard the entrance to Thebes and to kill anyone who fails to answer her riddle correctly. Laius returns to Thebes to take up the throne. Laius and his queen, Jocasta, are childless and Laius turns to the Delphic oracle of Apollo for advice. The prophecy is made that, just as it was for Kronos and Zeus, that if ever Laius has a son, that son will murder Laius. This prophecy only contains the parricidal half of the prophecy which Oedipus is later given. Laius abstains from sex with Jocasta until, one day, according to Euripides' account in the *Phoenician Women*, after Laius becomes intoxicated, they conceive and Jocasta later gives birth to their son.

*Oedipus Rex* provides the story from here. In an attempt to avoid the prophecy, Laius pins his son's ankles together when he is a few days old and Jocasta instructs a palace servant to abandon the baby on Mount Cithaeron. The servant, a shepherd, takes pity on the baby, disobeys his orders and gives the boy to another shepherd, asking him to rear the baby as his own. That shepherd instead takes the baby to Corinth where he is adopted by the childless king and queen, Polybus and Merope. Polybus and Merope give Oedipus his name, which, as Freud's volume of Leopold Constans' *La Légende D'Oedipe* explains, means 'swollen foot', a name which repeats the tradition in Oedipus' bloodline of giving children names connected to difficulties in walking: Laius (Oedipus' father) means 'left-sided'; and Labdacus (Oedipus' grandfather) means 'lame'. Freud took the analysis of Oedipus' name one stage further in his correspondence with Jung. In a letter of November 1909, Freud writes: "Oedipus, I believe I have told you, means swollen foot, i.e., erected penis" (Freud, 1909e, p. 266).

As a young man, doubt is cast on Oedipus' parentage and, despite the assurances of Polybus and Merope that they are truly his parents, Oedipus consults Apollo's Oracle at Delphi. He is told that:

You are fated to couple with your mother, you will bring  
a breed of children into the light no man can bear to see –  
you will kill your father, the one who gave you life! (*Oedipus Rex*, 873 -876).

To protect Polybus and Merope, Oedipus flees from Corinth. At a triple crossroads in Phocis, a group of men, one of whom is Laius, tries to push Oedipus off the road. Oedipus kills all but one, the same servant who took Oedipus from Jocasta as a baby. The servant escapes and returns to Thebes with the news that Laius is dead. Oedipus, too, heads towards Thebes. He is confronted by the sphinx, a second barrier to his mother, who poses the famous riddle: 'What goes on four legs in the morning, two at noon and three in the evening?', a riddle Freud interprets as a distorted version of the question to do with where babies come from (Freud, 1905b, p. 195; Freud, 1925e, p. 37). The answer to the sphinx's riddle depends on whether Oedipus knows the human life cycle: from vulnerable baby who crawls on all fours, to upright adult, to the frailty of old age where we need a stick to assist our walking. Poignantly, Oedipus is able to answer the riddle without the life experience to draw on: as a baby, his crawling would have been hindered by the mutilation to his ankles; and now, as a man, his limping steps take him backwards to the mother's bedroom, not forwards to a partner of his own generation. As an old man, in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus will lean not on a stick but on Antigone, his daughter and sister, who then has to take on a maternal role<sup>21</sup>. It is only moments before his death that Oedipus is able to stand upright and lead both of his daughters by the hand. Oedipus ends his life at Colonus, Sophocles' own deme in the outskirts of Athens, where, finding acceptance at last, his life acquires retrospective meaning just before his death.

After Oedipus has correctly answered her riddle, the sphinx kills herself and the grateful Theban people invite Oedipus to be their king and to take Jocasta as his wife. In Freud's *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (Freud, 1901), Freud considers why Oedipus does not find anything objectionable in Jocasta's age and, asserting a phantasised collapse of time between the generations, concludes that "[when one is] in love with one's own mother one is never concerned with her as she is in the present but with her youthful mnemonic image carried over from one's childhood" (Freud, 1901, p. 178). (Engrossed in these thoughts, Freud immediately proceeded to bungle his

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<sup>21</sup> Freud called his daughter, Anna, his 'Antigone' which Gay suggests underscores Freud's identification with Oedipus: "Antigone was pre-eminent among Oedipus' children. She was his gallant and loyal companion, just as Anna became her father's chosen comrade over the years. It is Antigone who, in *Oedipus at Colonus*, leads her blind father by the hand, and by 1923, it was Anna Freud who was firmly installed as her wounded father's secretary, confidante, representative, colleague and nurse" (Gay, 1998, p. 442).

treatment of a ninety year old patient, muddling the morphine solution for her injection with the lotion for her eye (ibid)). Vernant and Vidal-Naquet comment: "But the point is, precisely, that it is not possible that Oedipus should have preserved any image of Jocasta from his childhood days (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1988, p. 427, note 14, their underline). Is this a fair criticism? Superficially, it would appear so. But then we realise that Freud is not looking to find an Oedipus complex within Oedipus: it is right that Oedipus has no accessible memory of his mother; but it is equally right that we find nothing strange in the age gap between Oedipus and Jocasta in Oedipus' enactment of our phantasies.

Freud thought time was often represented by space (Freud, 1900, p. 408; Freud, 1933, p. 26) and tracking Oedipus' movements through space provides an interesting study in their representation of Oedipus' (lack of) temporal development. Abandoned by his parents, Oedipus passes from Thebes, via the two shepherds, to Corinth. He leaves Corinth to protect his adoptive parents, and arrives at the three-way crossroads where, pre-parricide, he has the option of self-defence or possible death. Notably, Plato's suggested embellishment of the law for a parricide was that, after execution, the parricide's corpse should be taken to a place outside the city where three roads meet for officials then to throw stones, one each, at the corpse's head in an act of purification (Plato's *Laws* 872c7 – 873c1, cited in Saunders, 1994, p. 242). The crossroads where Oedipus murdered his father might be taken in this context to symbolise not only the barred path back to the mother's bedroom, but the scene of the legal punishment for a parricidal breach of the prohibiting agency of the father, the tragedy and the law meeting in an attempt to represent the crime through a spatial location.

Once he has murdered his father, Oedipus meets the sphinx, where pre-incest, he must answer the riddle or die. The sphinx, according to Freud, represents the father: "[T]he hero can only obtain possession of the queen mother after he has repeated his deed upon the monster who symbolizes the father" (Freud, 1928, p. 188). Defending himself successfully against both father and the sphinx takes Oedipus backwards, not forwards, into a bedroom whose door has been left open by his seductive mother. Every step forwards in space that Oedipus takes is, in fact, a retrograde step towards the temporal disaster constituted by incest which fails to acknowledge the difference

between the generations. The tragedy is that Oedipus was born to succeed to the Theban crown, as Laius' son: it was his parents' brutal abandonment of him which perverted his path to succession.

For some years, Thebes prospers. Oedipus and Jocasta have four children. But then plague strikes. Oedipus sends Jocasta's brother, Creon, to Delphi, to Apollo's oracle, to establish the cause. Apollo's command is to find Laius' murderer for he is the cause of Thebes' pollution. As I discussed earlier in the chapter, Freud believes the tragic hero must represent both father of the primal horde and the sons who murder him, the victim and the murderers (Freud, 1913d, p. 156) and here Oedipus occupies precisely that role as both saviour and pollutant of Thebes.

Tiresias, the blind seer, is brought to the palace and tells Oedipus that he, Oedipus, is the murderer he hunts. Jocasta gives little weight to Tiresias, a prophet. She proffers evidence that prophecies are of no account by telling Oedipus, in a shockingly perfunctory way, how she and Laius sidestepped the prophecy that Laius would be killed by his son, by murdering their baby. Jocasta says:

[S]o much for prophecy. It's neither here nor there.  
From this day on, I won't look left or right (*Oedipus Rex*, 948 –949).

In her discounting of the prophecy, Jocasta reveals that Laius was cut down at a three way crossroads and Oedipus starts to worry: "I have a terrible fear the blind seer can see" (*Oedipus Rex*, 823). Oedipus learns that one of Laius' servants, a shepherd, escaped from the massacre at the crossroads and sends for him. Before the servant appears, a messenger arrives to tell Oedipus that Polybus has died and that Oedipus has been invited to take up the Corinthian crown. A moment of relief for Oedipus, then: if Polybus has died of old age, then the prophecy that he will kill his father cannot be true. And, as for the other part of the prophecy, Jocasta tells him that men's dreams of sleeping with their mother are commonplace:

Many a man before you,  
in his dreams, has shared his mother's bed.  
Take such things as shadows, nothing at all –  
Live, Oedipus,  
as if there's no tomorrow! (*Oedipus Rex*, 1074 – 1078).

Jocasta's choice of spatial references - the prophecy being "neither here nor there", her decision not to "look left or right" – and her injunction to Oedipus to "live, as if there's no tomorrow!": these all provide apt spatial and temporal metaphors for the timelessness of the unconscious and its incestuous phantasies which she enacts with her son.

Mitchell-Boyask reveals that the only passage marked in the volume Freud owned of Bonner's translation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* is the one which contains Jocasta's assurances that each man dreams of sharing his mother's bed (Mitchell-Boyask, 1984, p. 26). Perhaps this lies behind Freud's assertion in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, that Sophocles' tragedy provides an "unmistakable indication" that the Oedipus legend "sprang from some primaeval dream-material which had as its content the distressing disturbance of a child's relation to his parents owing to the first stirrings of sexuality" (Freud, 1900, pp. 263 –264). Freud seems to have been aware of Plato's claim that dreams contain this type of disturbing material. In a footnote added in 1914 to *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud wrote: "Plato [...] thought that the best men are those who only *dream* what other men *do* in their waking life" (Freud, 1900, p67), which I think follows from Plato's account of Socrates' discussion of the desires that: "wake us when we sleep, when the reasonable and humane part of us is asleep and its control relaxed, and our fierce bestial nature, full of food and drink, rouses itself and tries to secure its own kind of satisfaction. As you know, there's nothing bad for it and it's completely lost to all sense and shame. It doesn't shrink from attempting intercourse (as it supposes) with a mother or anyone else, man, beast or god, or from murder or eating forbidden food" (Plato: *The Republic*, Book IX, 571d - 576b).

Despite Jocasta telling him to ignore the prophecy, Oedipus remains fearful: Merope remains alive and, still seeking to protect her, Oedipus tells the messenger of the potential danger to his mother were he to return to Corinth. The messenger, hoping to persuade Oedipus to take up the crown, reveals that Polybus and Merope were not Oedipus' birth parents. And he should know: he turns out to be the shepherd who took Oedipus from Laius' servant, the servant for whom Oedipus has already sent to question about Laius' death. At this point, Jocasta starts blustering, telling Oedipus

not to give it another thought. But Oedipus persists. Jocasta begs Oedipus not to continue, that if he loves his own life, he should call off the search. Oedipus says:

I must know it all,  
must see the truth at last (*Oedipus Rex*, 1168-1169).

His mother replies:

You're doomed –  
may you never fathom who you are! (*Oedipus Rex*, 1172 –1173).

In his short paper, 'On Arrogance', Bion looks at Sophocles' Oedipus "from a point of view which makes the sexual crime a peripheral element of a story in which the central crime is the arrogance of Oedipus in vowing to lay bare the truth at no matter what cost" (Bion, 1958, p. 144). Is it arrogant of Oedipus to seek the truth at any cost? For Freud, Oedipus' quest for the truth was not arrogant, as Bion would have it, but heroic. Indeed, the first page that Freud underlines in his volume of Constans' *La Légende D'Oedipe* states unequivocally that: "Oedipus is a hero of the same character as Zeus, Apollo, Heracles, Bellerophon, etc, that is to say, a personification of light or enlightenment" (Mitchell-Boyask, 1994, p. 33).

When the old palace servant, the other shepherd whom we know to be the remaining link in the human chain which carried Oedipus from Thebes over the Cithaeron mountain range to Corinth, arrives, he confirms reluctantly that Oedipus is indeed the son of Laius and Jocasta. Oedipus has at last solved the mystery of his birth and discovered the truth about his patricidal and incestuous past:

O god  
all come true, all burst to light!  
O light – now let me look my last on you!  
I stand revealed at last –  
cursed in my birth, cursed in marriage, cursed in the lives I cut down with  
these hands! (*Oedipus Rex*, 1306 –1310).

The Chorus describes the retrospective redefinition of Oedipus' marriage to Jocasta, the impact of present knowledge on past events containing the seeds of Freud's later theory of *Nachträglichkeit*:

Time, all-seeing Time has dragged you to the light,  
judged your marriage monstrous from the start –  
the son and the father tangling, both one –



O child of Laius, would to god  
I'd never seen you, never! never! (*Oedipus Rex*, 1340-1345).

Oedipus crashes into Jocasta's chamber, presumably to kill her. But he finds her already dead, spinning backwards and forwards on her noose. A messenger tells us that Oedipus then gave a "low, wrenching sob that broke our heart" (ibid, 1378) before gently taking his mother down. He rips off her golden brooches and blinds himself with their pins, lamenting his failure to die on Mount Cithaeron as a baby, wishing that the pins holding his ankles together had not been removed<sup>22</sup>. Earlier in this chapter, I referred to the connection Freud makes in *The Ego and the Id* between melancholia, the expectation of punishment and a tyrannical superego (Freud, 1923a, p. 53). In the same context, Freud makes this moving observation: "the ego gives itself up because it feels itself hated and persecuted by the super-ego, instead of loved. [...] It sees itself deserted by all protecting forces and lets itself die" (Freud, 1923a, pp. 58 – 59). I see this desertion represented by Oedipus' parents: Oedipus is mutilated and abandoned at birth, later pushed aside by his abusive father and the recipient of this response from his incestuous mother in his quest for the truth of his identity: "You're doomed –/ may you never fathom who you are!" (*Oedipus Rex*, 1172 –1173).

When Oedipus emerges from the palace, the Chorus shrinks away, just as we do. Oedipus and the audience are enlightened: he, through being conscious at last that he is the murderer of his father, the incestuous son of his mother; we, the audience, according to Freud, through the frightful knowledge of the nature of our repressed phantasies:

Now,

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<sup>22</sup> The Greeks took gold to be a dense form of blended sunlight and water. Golden objects in Greek mythology are often emphasised as both intrinsically valuable and sinister: the golden fleece brings disaster; Oedipus blinds himself with Jocasta's golden brooches; the poisoned dress which Medea sends to Jason's bride-to-be to murder her is stressed as being made of gold. Freud's connection of gold with faeces is in point here: "In reality, wherever archaic modes of thought have predominated or persist—in the ancient civilizations, in myths, fairy tales and superstitions, in unconscious thinking, in dreams and in neuroses—money is brought into the most intimate relationship with dirt. We know that the gold which the devil gives his paramours turns into excrement after his departure, and the devil is certainly nothing else than the personification of the repressed unconscious instinctual life. We also know about the superstition which connects the finding of treasure with defaecation, and everyone is familiar with the figure of the 'shitter of ducats [*Dukatenscheisser*]'. Indeed, even according to ancient Babylonian doctrine gold is 'the faeces of Hell' (Mammon = *ilu manman*). Thus in following the usage of language, neurosis, here as elsewhere, is taking words in their original, significant sense, and where it appears to be using a word figuratively it is usually simply restoring its old meaning. It is possible that the contrast between the most precious substance known to men and the most worthless, which they reject as waste matter ('refuse'), has led to this specific identification of gold with faeces" (Freud, 1908b, pp. 173 – 174).

loathed by the gods, son of the mother I defiled  
coupling in my father's bed, spawning lives in the loins  
that spawned my wretched life. What grief can crown this grief?  
It's mine alone, my destiny – I am Oedipus! (*Oedipus Rex*, 1492 – 1496).

Oedipus begs Creon to permit Jocasta last rites, to take care of his daughters, Antigone and Ismene, and to exile him from Thebes. Creon agrees. Oedipus is thus cast out of Thebes twice: first by his parents; then by Creon. But, the second time is at his request and Antigone will later join him, his daughter and his sister who then takes on a maternal role. *Oedipus Rex* ends with Oedipus about to leave Thebes to fulfil his destiny, knowing that he has been saved for something “great, terrible and strange” (ibid, 1596 – 1597).

The ending of *Oedipus Rex* is very different from Aeschylus' *The Eumenides*: Oedipus leaves Thebes, blind and exiled; Orestes bounds from court to take up the throne of Argos. The different endings highlight the fundamental difference I believe exists between Aeschylus' *Oresteia* and Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, a difference related to temporality and one which led Freud to see in Sophocles' tragedy, and the audience's response to it, a universal truth which confirmed the theory Freud had deduced from his self-analysis and from dreams. The comparison exercise which follows demonstrates this difference by distinguishing the tragedians' representations of Orestes' and Oedipus' deeds, intentionality, guilt, trial and punishment. I want to refute Vernant's accusation that Freud proceeds in a simplistic fashion to reduce “of all Greek mythology to one particular legendary schema, of the whole of tragedy to one particular play, of this one play to one particular aspect of the story and of this aspect to a dream – one might as well substitute, for example, Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* for Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and maintain that the tragic effect is produced because, given every woman at one time dreams of murdering her husband, it is distress at her own guilt that is revealed and that overwhelms her, in her horror at Clytaemnestra's crime” (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1988, p. 93). I propose that Freud's choice was not arbitrary or simplistic but, instead, astute: a choice which followed from Freud's recognition of Sophocles' unique ability to represent the state of mind within which time is an emergent quality.

I made the point earlier in this chapter that the tragedians used a legal framework to express some of the tensions inherent in the period of separation from the gods to the

relative autonomy which followed from the emergence of the city state and the birth of politics and law. Aeschylus and Sophocles each represented different types of law in operation, both in the observance and the breach: divine law, talion law, the law of the family and the law of the emerging city state. Carawan's *Rhetoric and the Law of Draco* (Carawan, 1998) suggests that, by the time that Aeschylus and Sophocles were writing their tragedies, Greece had developed a relatively sophisticated legal system: the harsh laws of Draco had been tempered by Draco's replacement, Solon. Murder continued to be punished by death, however, unless justified (for example, in crimes of passion) and parricide was seen as the most heinous of murders (Carawan, 1998, p. 152). This accords with Freud's view that the enactment of incestuous and parricidal phantasies which, as I discussed in the last chapter, represent two of the most fundamental wishes we have (Freud, 1900, p. 263) constitutes the earliest of crimes (Freud, 1913d, p. 142).

Orestes and Oedipus both committed parricide and Oedipus committed incest, too. In ancient Greece, as now, the test to establish whether someone was guilty of a crime contained two limbs: the *actus reus* (guilty act) and *mens rea* (the guilty mind). Did Orestes and Oedipus have the requisite intention, the guilty mind? Both were influenced by Apollo, the voice of destiny, in their actions but there is an important difference: Orestes was told to avenge his father by killing his mother and did so, knowing what it was that he was doing and why he was doing it. Oedipus, on the other hand, having been told by Apollo that he would kill his father and marry his mother, chose to try to avoid his fate and, on the traditional interpretation of the tragedy to which Freud subscribed, acted unknowingly in killing his father – although not unknowingly in killing a man - and later accepting Jocasta's hand in marriage.

John Steiner suggests a different view, allying himself with Vellacott's analysis which suggests that Oedipus and the people around him turned a blind eye to the truth (Vellacott, 1971; Steiner, 1985). It seems clear enough that some of Oedipus' entourage must have known what was going on: we learn early on in Sophocles' tragedy that the servant who took Oedipus from Jocasta when he was a few days old, and also witnessed Laius' murder, begged Jocasta, as soon as he saw Oedipus on the throne, to send him as far away as possible from Thebes; Tiresias, the seer, tells Oedipus at their first meeting that Oedipus is the murderer, but says that he would

never have come to Thebes if Oedipus had not called for him; Creon, when asked by Oedipus why a full enquiry into Laius' murder did not take place at the time, answers somewhat furtively:

[T]he singing, riddling Sphinx  
she..... persuaded us to let the mystery go  
and concentrate on what lay at our feet (*Oedipus Rex*, 148-150).

And Jocasta, who may have wondered why her lover was her son's age and had strange scars on his legs, made it very clear that prophecy or, indeed, any search for the truth, is not a good thing.

There seems to be ample evidence, then, to support Steiner's contention that blind eyes are being turned towards Oedipus' actions, but only insofar as the characters around Oedipus are concerned. For Oedipus himself, I prefer the traditional reading that Oedipus did not know what he was doing. The dry suggestion Steiner makes in support of his argument, that "when a homeless young man is offered a kingdom and a wife, he might well be persuaded not to ask too many questions" (Steiner, 1985, p. 166) is not sufficient: it fails to address the point that Oedipus starts asking questions seventeen years later, when he has so much more to lose. That Oedipus committed his crime unintentionally is Freud's reading, too. In *Totem and Taboo*, he takes Oedipus as an example of someone whose actions, whilst unintended, still give rise to guilt: "[T]he guilt of Oedipus was not palliated by the fact that he incurred it without his knowledge and even against his intention" (Freud, 1913d, p. 68, footnote). And this is as it should be, says Freud, as, from a psychological perspective, Oedipus is truly guilty. In 'Dostoevsky and Parricide', Freud makes the point that:

The naked admission of an intention to commit parricide, as we arrive at it in analysis, seems intolerable without analytic preparation. The Greek drama, while retaining the crime, introduces the indispensable toning-down in a masterly fashion by projecting the hero's unconscious motive into reality in the form of a compulsion by a destiny which is alien to him. *The hero commits the deed unintentionally* and apparently uninfluenced by the woman (Freud, 1928, p. 188, my emphasis).

He goes on:

After his guilt has been revealed and made conscious, the hero makes no attempt to exculpate himself by appealing to the artificial expedient of the

compulsion of destiny. His crime is acknowledged and punished as though it were a full and conscious one—which is bound to appear unjust to our reason, but which psychologically is perfectly correct (ibid, pp. 188-189).

In terms of intentionality, then, Orestes seems to have it and Oedipus to lack it. What of guilt? Earlier in the chapter, I suggested that Freud took the capacity for guilt to develop alongside the superego in a two-stage process. There is a development from a sense of guilt being entirely contingent on external authority figures discovering one's misdeeds and the threat of punishment attaching to that discovery, to an internally mediated sense of guilt which can attach to thoughts, both conscious and unconscious, rather than actions, as a result of the judgment of the superego. The superego is created from the internalized authority figures of the first stage and from which there is no escape. Aeschylus' tragedies seem to illustrate the first of the two stages whereby Freud thought we acquire the capacity for guilt, the stage where guilt is dependent on being found to be guilty by external figures of authority. An internally mediated sense of guilt appears entirely lacking in Orestes' household: Agamemnon, who kills Iphigenia to aid the war effort, seems to move on from her murder without guilt ("Law is law! – Let all go well" (*Agamemnon*, 216 – 217)); Clytaemnestra took responsibility for her premeditated murder of Agamemnon but seems proud rather than guilty ("Here I stand and here I struck/ And here my word is done./ I did it all. I don't deny it, no" (*Agamemnon* – 1398 – 1400)); and Orestes claims that his murder of Clytaemnestra was divinely ordained, an act for which he would not be found guilty:

And the magic spells that fired up my daring?  
One comes first. The Seer of Delphi who declared,  
'Go through with this and you go free of guilt'  
(*The Libation Bearers*, 1026 – 1028).

Klein takes Orestes' superego to be represented in Cassandra's predictions of grief and future punishment (Klein, 1963). But this, I think, is further evidence that Klein overlooked the distinction between the two origins of a sense of guilt. Cassandra, I suggest, represents not Orestes' superego but an example of an external figure of authority, someone who, when we are in the first stage of guilt, we must avoid. As the Leader of the Chorus says to Cassandra:

We'd heard your fame as a seer.  
But no one looks for seers in Argos (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 1098 – 1099).

I suppose it might be argued that Orestes' sense of guilt is represented externally, in the manifestation of the Furies which only he can see. But the placation of the Furies and Orestes' guilt is decided by a court of law, the external forum of the court of the Areiopagus in Athens. Athena placates the Furies and provides the final judgement: Clytaemnestra killed her husband so Orestes was right to kill her. Orestes can walk free from the court to take up the throne of Argos, succeeding his dead father, Agamemnon, and untainted by his murder of Clytaemnestra. Aeschylus' analysis of justice in the *Oresteia* thus takes place entirely within an external forum: Orestes' crime, guilt, judgment and (lack of) punishment are all explored in the external arena with Orestes finally being tried and found not guilty in a court of law. Orestes illustrates, I believe, what Freud calls the first origin of a sense of guilt: "one arising from fear of an authority [which] insists upon a renunciation of instinctual satisfactions" (Freud, 1930a, p. 127).

In contrast to Orestes, whose judgment is one handed down by an external figure of authority, Oedipus judges himself. He finds himself guilty, refuses to consider his lack of intentionality as mitigation and punishes himself for his enlightenment with blindness and exile. And when the Chorus ask him what superhuman power drove him to gouge out his eyes, Oedipus replies that he carried out his punishment alone.

Apollo, friends, Apollo –  
 He ordained my agonies – there, my pains on pains!  
 But the hand that struck my eyes was mine.  
 Mine alone – no one else –  
 I did it all myself (*Oedipus Rex*, 1467 – 1471).

To me, Oedipus illustrates the second, later, origin of a sense of guilt "arising from fear of the super-ego [which also] insists upon a renunciation of instinctual satisfactions [and] presses for punishment, since the continuance of the forbidden wishes cannot be concealed from the super-ego" (Freud, 1930a, p. 127).

The superego is, as I discussed in the last chapter, an embodiment of the critical and aspirational voices of parents and, later, society. The superego proper follows the Oedipus complex: "The super-ego is in fact the heir to the Oedipus complex and is only established after that complex has been disposed of" (Freud, 1938d, p. 206). Britton's concept of 'triangular space' introduced in his seminal paper, 'The Missing

Link: Parental Sexuality in the Oedipus Complex' (Britton, 1989), is useful here because it ties together the emergence of the superego on conclusion of the Oedipus complex with the child's acknowledgement of the parents' relationship, its recognition the link which closes the Oedipal triangle. Britton emphasises the psychic space thus created: "The closure of the oedipal triangle by the recognition of the link joining the parents provides a limiting boundary for the internal world. It creates what I call a 'triangular space' - i.e., a space bounded by the three persons of the Oedipal situation and all their potential relationships" (Britton, 1989, p. 86). Britton does not, however, conclude that time follows, too, something which I believe it is consistent with Freud to assert (Noel-Smith, 2002). For, as I have emphasised earlier, Freud suggests in an important footnote to 'On Narcissism' that, as the superego grows and strengthens, so, too, does our ability to structure things temporally: "the developing and strengthening of this observing agency might contain within it the subsequent genesis of (subjective) memory and the time-factor, the latter of which has no application to unconscious processes" (Freud, 1914c, p. 96, footnote).

I referred to Freud's concept of the time-factor in the last chapter, in the context of endopsychic myths, and I will examine it again in Chapter Four. In this chapter, I want to look more closely at the connection Freud makes in the footnote I have just cited between (subjective) memory and the time factor. This is important in the context of the distinction Freud makes between remembering, which is the recall to consciousness of a subjective memory of a past event, and repetition, which is the unconscious enactment of unconscious material. The compulsion to repeat, the power of which overrides the pleasure principle and so led Freud to the death instinct (Freud, 1920, pp. 22 – 23), can replace the impulsion to remember. This means that the forgotten and repressed is not reproduced as a conscious memory of something recognised to be temporally located in the past, but, instead, acted out in unconscious repetition so that temporal organisation cannot take place. Freud famously observed the repetition compulsion in one of his patients, Dora: "[B]ecause of the unknown quantity in me which reminded Dora of Herr K., she took her revenge on me as she wanted to take her revenge on him, and deserted me as she believed herself to have been deceived and deserted by him. Thus she acted out an essential part of her recollections and phantasies instead of reproducing it in the treatment" (Freud, 1905a, p. 119).

The timeless element to the compulsion lies not only in its interminable repetition of unconscious material but also in its transmission through the generations, a notion of succession raised by Freud in *The Ego and the Id* in his claim that certain ego experiences, if repeated often enough, create a residue which is eventually laid down as an id experience capable of being inherited (Freud, 1923a, p. 38). This idea of trauma from previous generations being revisited on the family's descendants is also explored in Fraiberg's 1975 paper on 'Ghosts in the Nursery'. Fraiberg reaffirms Freud's point that, until traumatic events are remembered, they will be repeated. The ghosts in the nursery are "the visitors from the unremembered pasts of the parents; the uninvited guests at the christening. [...]. They have been present at the christening for two or more generations. While none has issued an invitation the ghosts take up residence and conduct the rehearsal of the family tragedy from a tattered script" (Fraiberg et al, 1975, pp. 387–388, cited in Fonagy et al, 1993, p. 957).

The Houses of Atreus and Thebes provide many examples of these ghosts and the compulsive repetition of horrible deeds, summarised in Appendix II. In Orestes' family, acts of vengeful murder take place in almost every generation. There is similar evidence of repetition in Oedipus' family: Oedipus' father, for example, is expelled from Thebes, rapes the son of his protector and goes on to mutilate and abandon his own son. Oedipus' revelation, on the other hand, is, for the audience, more akin to remembering than repetition. Freud compares the process of revelation in Sophocles' tragedy with psychoanalysis: "The action of the play consists in nothing other than the process of revealing, with cunning delays and ever-mounting excitement—a process that can be likened to the work of a psychoanalysis. [...] While the poet, as he unravels the past, brings to light the guilt of Oedipus, he is at the same time compelling us to recognize our own inner minds, in which those same impulses, though suppressed, are still to be found" (Freud, 1900, pp. 261 – 263). Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, through the process of Oedipus' revelation, brings knowledge of our childhood phantasies to consciousness. There is no such revelation in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, no such recognition of the contents of our inner minds.

In 'Analysis Terminable and Interminable', Freud suggests that: "[t]he main instrument [ ...] for curbing the patient's compulsion to repeat and for turning it into a motive for remembering lies in the handling of the transference" (Freud, 1937a, p.



154). Sophocles' skill, which makes his tragedy one of remembering rather than of repetition, lies in his handling of the transference of Oedipus' feelings to the audience. The chord is struck when Oedipus says: "What grief can crown this grief? It's mine alone, my destiny – I am Oedipus!" (*Oedipus Rex*, 1495 – 1496). We are impelled to remember, to give temporal validity to our own Oedipal wishes which arose in our past, and we recoil.

Here is one in whom these primaeval wishes of our childhood have been fulfilled, and we shrink back from him with the whole force of the repression by which those wishes have since that time been held down within us (Freud, 1900, pp. 262 – 263).

I have already differentiated Sophocles' Oedipus from Aeschylus' Orestes on the basis that Orestes represents Freud's first stage of guilt, when the time factor is not fully incorporated, and Oedipus the second stage, when the Oedipus complex ends, the superego is in place and the time factor begins its count. Now there is another, related, difference to consider. In his paper, 'Recollecting, Repeating and Working Through' (Freud, 1914a), Freud looks at the failure to remember what is repressed, which results in its repetition. I discuss the consequences for our ability to structure experiences temporally further in Chapter Four. Here, I would note that Aeschylus' portrayal of Orestes continues the idea of timeless repetition whereas Sophocles' portrayal of Oedipus' revelation forces the audience to remember, to give temporal (and temporary) acknowledgment to those memories we would prefer to forget.

Freud's footnote to the extract I have cited above, from page 125 of *Civilisation and its Discontents*, where Freud suggests we should wait until after the establishment of the superego before speaking of a sense of guilt, provides that: "[I]t is not merely a question of the *existence* of a super-ego but of its relative strength and sphere of influence" (Freud, 1930a, p. 125, footnote, Freud's emphasis). This suggests a process whereby it is the emergence of the superego which facilitates the transition from an externally to an internally generated sense of guilt. As the superego grows and becomes stronger, its repressive function extends to cover not only actions but conscious thoughts of those actions. Thus, Freud suggests that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* "has its roots in the same soil as *Oedipus Rex*" (Freud, 1900, p. 264), that is, a soil which feeds the phantasy to sleep with one's mother and murder one's father. In Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, the child's wishful phantasy to murder his father and sleep

with his mother is fulfilled. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, however, the phantasy remains repressed. The same material receives different treatment by Sophocles and Shakespeare because of what Freud calls the "secular advance of repression in the emotional life of mankind" (ibid), the advance which took place during the thousands of years which divide the two playwrights. Freud looks *forwards* from Sophocles to Shakespeare. If the second stage of guilt is represented by Sophocles' Oedipus, I believe it is consistent with Freud to look *backwards*, to the first stage of guilt, represented by Aeschylus' Orestes, where the time factor is not fully incorporated, and back further still, to the timeless myths in which, as I discussed in the last chapter, phantasies are represented as fulfilled without guilt.

I want to conclude this chapter by touching on a striking development in Greek theatre which seems to have escaped comment to date. Aeschylus increased the numbers of actors in addition to the chorus from Thespis' singleton to two actors. Sophocles' innovation was to add a third actor (Aristotle, *Poetics*, 49a16 – 20, p 8). Although these changing theatrical devices are referred to in texts on Greek tragedy, few conclusions seem to be drawn specifically from them. Vernant and Vidal-Naquet mention the changes only in parenthetical passing (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 1988, p. 305). And Freud, although he refers to these developments of Greek theatre in *Totem and Taboo* (Freud, 1913d, p. 155- 156), did not draw any specific conclusions from them<sup>23</sup>. My proposition is that Aeschylus' introduction of a second actor permitted representation of the first part of the psychic structure Freud envisaged we have in place when guilt remains an externally mediated proposition; something which follows from the judgment of external forces, as exemplified by Orestes' trial. Sophocles' introduction of a third into the cast provided a more dynamic theatrical space, a triangular theatrical framework within which Sophocles could explore in *Oedipus Rex* the ideas of law and guilt for its breach being internally mediated propositions. Psychically, it is only from within this internalised triangular structure that the idea of the superego is a possibility. And it is only with the development of the superego that we see the development of what Freud calls the time-factor. My

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<sup>23</sup> Freud's comment in *Totem and Taboo* was this: "A company of individuals, named and dressed alike, surrounded a single figure, all hanging upon his words and deeds: they were the Chorus and the impersonator of the Hero. He was originally the only actor. Later, a second and third actor were added, to play as counterpart to the Hero and as characters split off from him; but the character of the Hero himself and his relation to the Chorus remained unaltered" (Freud, 1913d, pp. 155- 156).

conclusion is that only Sophocles' Greek tragedy of *Oedipus Rex* would do for Freud as the narrative which anticipates, illustrates and validates Freud's own theory of human development, a narrative which underpins the psychic transition which takes us from the state of amoral timelessness represented by myths into the guilt-ridden time of tragic consciousness.

“FORSCHER v MYSTIKER”

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Just as Greek myth gave way to Greek tragedy, Greek tragedy, in its turn, gave way to Greek philosophy. In what is traditionally taken to be a paradigm shift, the philosophers of the Milesian School for the first time sought to explain phenomena empirically, through scientific observation and reasoned explanation. Freud jotted "Forscher v Mystiker" [researcher v mystic] in the margin of page 58 of the first volume of his collection of Gomperz' *Griechische Denker* [*Greek Thinkers: A History of Ancient Philosophy*] suggesting his interest in the Presocratic move from mysticism to science (Mitchell-Boyask, 1984, p. 28). William Guthrie, in the first volume of *A History of Greek Philosophy*, describes the emergence of Presocratic philosophy like this: "For religious faith there was substituted the faith that was and remains the triumph of scientific thought with all its triumphs and all its limitations: that is, the faith that the visible world conceals a rational and intelligible order, that the causes of the natural world are to be sought within its boundaries, and that autonomous human reason is our sole and sufficient instrument for the search" (Guthrie, 1962, p. 29). Guthrie represents the traditional view that the ancient Greek narrative of myth and tragedy was replaced by the logic of philosophy. Recently, a more integrative analysis has been adopted, one where mythos and logos are taken to be complementary ways in which we make meaning, rather than contradictory (Buxton, 1999; Most, 2001)<sup>24</sup>.

Some commentators suggest that philosophy held little interest for Freud.

Hinshelwood, for example, has said: "Freud himself was not interested in philosophy, and thought it largely irrelevant to psychoanalysis" (Hinshelwood, 2005, p. 325). In

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<sup>24</sup> Most points to Nestle as an important proponent of the traditional view, Nestle taking mythos and logos as representative of the unconscious and consciousness respectively and as contradictory ways in which we make meaning: "Mythos and Logos – with these terms we denote the two poles between which man's mental life oscillates. Mythic imagination and logical thought are opposites. The former is magistic and involuntary, and creates and forms on the basis of the unconscious, while the latter is conceptual and intentional, and analyses and sympathises by means of consciousness" (Nestle, 1940 p V as cited in Most (Most, 1999, p. 26).

this chapter, I hope to counter that view, demonstrating that certain aspects of Greek philosophy were of particular interest to Freud and specifically relevant to his theory of drives from which time follows. (In Chapter Four, I indicate Freud's other engagements with philosophy, especially Kant's philosophy of time and space.)

Philosophy, of course, is not what it was. Presocratic philosophy is largely what we would call now natural philosophy, its empirical tools of observation and measurement becoming those of science. But the Greek philosophers employed speculation, too. Jonathan Barnes' excellent *The Presocratic Philosophers* includes a chapter, 'Science and Speculation', which claims that the combination of empiricism and speculation was essential to Greek thinking. Barnes cites Kahn in support of this view:

The alliance between careful observation and bold speculation is not only natural but essential in early Greek thought, the very condition for the creation of science and philosophy in the Greek sense (Kahn, 1960, as cited in Barnes, 2000, p. 50).

This description of an alliance between empiricism and speculation seems to capture Freud perfectly. The empirical approach was one he embraced from student days. Franz Brentano, the Aristotelian expert, published *Psychology from the Empirical Standpoint* when Freud was a student (Askay and Farquhar, 2006, p. 91) and Freud found Brentano's empirical approach through the application of a scientific methodology to philosophy, and to psychology in particular, most appealing (Freud, 1875c, p. 102). The importance of this empirical approach to Freud, and its emphasis on quantitative, measurable, processes is evident in his explicit objective set out in the opening part of the *Project* to provide a scientific account of mind:

The intention is to furnish a psychology that shall be a natural science: that is, to represent psychical processes as quantitatively determinate states of specifiable material particles, thus making those processes perspicuous and free from contradiction (Freud, 1950, p. 295).

As well as an empirical approach, Freud, like the Presocratics, used analogy to illustrate his findings. Presocratic philosophy is "striking" for its use of analogy (Barnes, 2000, p. 40). Anaximenes, the third of the Milesian trilogy I examine below, is particularly impressive: stars move round the earth like turbans around our head; the universe whirls like a mill stone; stars are fixed in the crystalline like nails; falling

rocks can bounce like balls (Barnes, 2000, p. 53 et seq). Freud, too, is notable for illustrating his work with analogies deliberately taken from the everyday world. He concludes *Studies on Hysteria* with an unapologetic acknowledgment of his use of analogy and asserts his intention, despite anticipated objection, to continue its use to illuminate otherwise difficult material (Freud, 1893, p. 291). And he does: in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the microscope and camera are used as analogies to illustrate the mental apparatus (Freud, 1900, p. 536), Freud at pains to state that these analogies are only intended to assist in making complex mental functioning intelligible (like the Presocratics, Freud avoids the specious attribution of inferential status to analogies); depression becomes analogous to an open wound (Freud, 1917b, p. 253); and psychoanalysis to archaeology (Freud, 1907a, pp. 4-5; and 1937b, p. 259). In the *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, in discussing the relationships between the realms of the super-ego, the ego and the id and the blurred boundaries between them, Freud uses the analogy of a landscape of hills, plains and lakes populated by Germans, Magyars and Slovaks who carry on different agricultural activities. The discussion is introduced with this sentence: “Let me give you an analogy; analogies, it is true, decide nothing, but they can make one feel more at home” (Freud, 1933, p. 72).

In addition to observation, measurement and the use of analogy, Freud, like the Presocratic philosophers, made bold speculations, too. Take Part IV of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud, 1920), for example, where his thoughts on the death drive are introduced by this statement: “What follows is speculation, often far-fetched speculation, which the reader will consider or dismiss according to his individual predilection. It is further an attempt to follow out an idea consistently, out of curiosity to see where it will lead” (Freud 1920, p. 24). Freud specifically refers in the preface to *The Ego and the Id* to these speculations, made in the spirit of “benevolent curiosity” (Freud, 1923a, p. 12), so that he can then replace them with clinical hypotheses based on analytic observations. But shortly afterwards, in ‘Neurosis and Psychosis’ (Freud, 1924a), he returns to speculation in his elaboration of the hypotheses of *The Ego and the Id* where he seeks to turn “grey theory” into “perpetual green experience” (Freud, 1924a, p. 149). Freud reveals in his ‘Autobiographical Study’ that, as he became older, he speculated more: “In the works of my later years (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, *Group Psychology and the Analysis*

*of the Ego*, and *The Ego and the Id*), I have given free rein to the inclination, which I kept down for so long, to speculation” (Freud, 1925e, p. 57).

Freud’s speculative approach, a key part of Greek thinking, was an anachronism for the nineteenth century world of science in which Freud moved. The combination of speculation and empiricism placed psychoanalysis then and now in somewhat of a no-man’s land: neither science nor art, psychoanalysis always sits uneasily as a discipline. Freud makes this complaint: “I have always felt it as a gross injustice that people have refused to treat psycho-analysis like any other science” (Freud, 1925e, p. 59). In the same year, in his paper, ‘The Resistances to Psycho-Analysis’, he expands on this issue which remains a live one:

Doctors regard it as a speculative system and refuse to believe that, like every other natural science, it is based on a patient and tireless elaboration of facts from the world of perception; philosophers, measuring it by the standard of their own artificially constructed systems, find that it starts from impossible premisses and reproach it because its most general concepts (which are only now in process of evolution) lack clarity and precision (Freud, 1925a, p. 217).

Jones suggests that Freud’s speculative tendency was a two-edged sword, a “daemon of creative speculation” which led Freud to make some serious misjudgements but also led him to some invaluable findings: “He was willing to believe in the improbable and the unexpected—the only way, as Heraclitus pointed out centuries ago, to discover new truths” (Jones, 1955, p. 479). Freud’s “daemon” went public on the death drive. On time, however, Freud seems to have kept the fruits of his speculation largely to himself. His sparse references to time are usually qualified in terms of their being ‘hints’ (Freud, 1920, p. 28) or ‘suspicions’ (Freud, 1925b, p. 23). And in a late exchange with Marie Bonaparte, to which I referred earlier, Freud confirmed that he had kept his ideas about time private (Freud, 1938e, p. 455).

The question as to why Freud made public his speculations on the death drive but kept mostly private his speculations on time remains open to debate. During the course of this chapter, especially in my account of Empedocles, I suggest that Freud liked to have a biological grounding for his speculative hypotheses which could then be given further academic authority by reference to similar findings by the Greeks. There is no biological or scientific validity for the conclusions to which I show Freud comes about time in the next chapter, hence, perhaps, Freud keeping his speculations private.

Using the same investigative tools of empiricism and speculation, and illustrating their findings by way of analogy, the Presocratics and Freud also seem to share a focus for their investigation: to establish the nature of an inaccessible domain. This quest is very well explored by Richard Askay and Jensen Farquhar in *Apprehending the Inaccessible: Freudian Psychoanalysis and Existential Phenomenology* (Askay and Farquhar, 2006). The Presocratics looked to establish the nature of the stuff underlying the external world. Freud took the royal road in the opposite direction, seeking to establish the nature of the inaccessible realm of the unconscious through his interpretation of its workings in dreams, slips of the tongue, jokes and neuroses. Despite the different directions of their searches, however, their respective conclusions about the fundamental constituents of our external and internal worlds are very similar: the Presocratics, who did not separate the "infinite" from "unlimited" (Guthrie, 1962, p. 86; and p. 337), found the underlying stuff of external reality to be without limit; and Freud found the unconscious to be timeless.

### *Anaximander*

The Milesian trilogy of Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes lived in Miletus in the mid 6<sup>th</sup> and early 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC and sought to establish what constitutes the fundamental stuff of reality, that is, its source or principle (*archê*). Thales, the first of the three and, according to Aristotle, the originator of natural philosophy, (*Metaphysics*, 983 b 20), found it in water; Anaximenes in air; and Anaximander in the *apeiron* from which the elements (earth, air, fire and water) emerge in opposition (hot and cold; dry and wet). Of the Milesian trilogy, it is only Anaximander who has a significant influence on Freud. Freud makes no reference to Anaximenes and only a passing humorous allusion to Thales in the meeting of the Viennese Society Meeting on March 20<sup>th</sup> 1907, suggesting that we should not automatically assume that Thales was a bedwetter when young just because he thought everything originated from water<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> Adolf Hautler had presented a lecture on 'Mysticisms and Comprehension of Nature' and Freud commented: "The mental life of the child is important for the psychological understanding of philosophical concepts. One should observe during what years the child lays the foundations of a moral law and when he begins to apply this to the outside world (e.g. justice, causality, etc.). In the course of the observations, one would find that these things happen in connection with commonplace situations of everyday life. When we take the infantile factor into account, however, we must leave aside the idea, more humorous than provable, that Thales, who let everything originate from water, was an enuretic,



The extent of Anaximander's work is impressive. He anticipates Darwin in *Concerning Nature*, claiming that species are not immutable as Aristotle would later have it, but evolve (Barnes, 2000, p. 19). His theory of earthly suspension is ingenious. Rather than insert a cushion of water to stop us dropping, as had Thales, Anaximander claimed that the earth was suspended without support. With equal space in every direction, it would need a reason to move in a particular direction; without good reason to move one way rather than another, it does not move. Aristotle shows the argument's flaw by drawing an analogy between Anaximander's claim and "the argument that a hair which is subject to uniform tension will not break, and that a man who is hungry and thirsty to an extreme but equal degree will abstain alike from food and drink" (Barnes, 2000, p. 26). The aspect of Anaximander's philosophy which had a bearing on Freud's theory of time is his fragment, *To Apeiron*, the earliest fragment of Greek philosophy, to which Freud refers in *Totem and Taboo* (Freud, 1913d, pp. 153 – 154). The fragment, which has generated much scholarly writing, is embedded within Simplicius' commentary which Barnes translates as follows:

Anaximander, son of Priaxiades, a Milesian who became successor and pupil to Thales, said that the unlimited (*apeiron*) is both principle (*archê*) and element (*stoicheion*) of the things that exist, being the first to introduce this name of the principle. He says that it is neither water nor any other of the so-called elements but some other unlimited nature, from which all the heavens and the worlds in them come about; and the things from which is the coming into being for the things that exist are also those into which their destruction comes about, in accordance with what must be. For they give justice (*dikê*) and reparation to one another for their offence (*adikia*) in accordance with the ordinance of time – speaking of them thus in rather poetical terms. And it is clear that, having observed the change of the four elements into one another, he did not think fit to make any one of these an underlying stuff, but something else apart from these (Simplicius 13: A9 + B1 in Barnes, 2000, p. 29).

Gomperz, whose works on the Greek thinkers remain in Freud's library, translates the fragment in the context of punishment: "Each separate existence here regarded as an iniquity, a usurpation, for which the clashing and mutually exterminating forms of life would "suffer atonement and penalty in the ordinance of time" (Gomperz, 1905, p.

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and that Heraclitus, on account of his auditory hallucinations and his sense of orderliness, was an analerotic" (Nunberg and Federn, 1974, p. 150 as cited in Hoffer, 1965, p. 378).

55). Freud's reference to the Anaximander fragment in *Totem and Taboo* is also made in the context of punishment; punishment for the original sin.

As I discussed in the last chapter, Freud took the original sin to be the murder of the primal father by the primal horde and he claimed that man's sense of guilt derives from that deed. The collective memory of the first murder is, in a sense, timeless in its repetition: first through human and animal sacrifice; then through cultural institutions such as Greek tragedy and religion, the sons' opposing senses of guilt and of rebelliousness continuing forever: "The memory of the first great act of sacrifice thus proved indestructible, in spite of every effort to forget it (Freud, 1913d, p. 151). Freud describes the Christian belief that Christ sacrificed his own life as a means to effect redemption of the original murderers from their sin. The doctrine of original sin can be traced further back still: Freud points to the Orphic mysteries, which spread to the ancient Greek philosophers and thus to Anaximander:

A fragment of Anaximander relates how the unity of the world was broken by a *primaeva* sin, and that whatever issued from it must bear the punishment (Freud, 1913d, pp. 152 – 153).

Freud's footnote to his reference to the Anaximander fragment reads: "Une sorte de péché proethnique" (Reinach, 1905-12, 2, 75 ff.)". Salamon Reinach, one of the sources to whom Freud refers several times in *Totem and Taboo*, was a famous French archeologist, curator of the Paris Musée des Antiquités Nationales and an editor of the *Revue Archéologique*. The work to which Freud refers is Reinach's *Cultes, mythes et religions* (Reinach, 1906) and the paragraph from which Freud makes his extract reads in full:

Dans un des rares fragments d'Anaximandre, conservé par Simplicius, il est dit que l'unité primitive du monde a été rompue par une sorte de péché proethnique dont les choses, issues de ce déchirement, doivent porter la peine (Reinach, 1906, p. 76). [In one of Anaximander's rare fragments, conserved by Simplicius, it is said that the original unity of the world was torn apart by some kind of original sin the penalty for which must be paid by whatever emerges from the tear (my translation)]

This suggests a reading of Anaximander that makes an exit from the *apeiron* a departure for which there is a price to pay, that the time of our life has a cost attached. The idea of life constituting a debt to be repaid is found in the ancient Greeks, in the Bible and in Shakespeare, too, Freud repeatedly using and misquoting Shakespeare's

reference. Euripides' tragedy, *Alcestis*, for example, has the Chorus tell Admetus, whose wife has given up her life so that Alcestis can live his for its full term:

Her death, Admetus, is a blow which you must bear.  
You are not the first of mortal men – no, nor the last  
To lose a noble-hearted wife. Consider this:  
Death is a debt which every one of us must pay (*Alcestis*, 415 – 419).

The Christian view, as expressed in Genesis, connects the debt to the original sin, that is, the eating of the apple from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the serpent tempting Eve, who ate and who then persuaded Adam to eat, too. God's ejection of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden is to prevent them from eating from the tree of eternal life, too: an interesting representation of the fact that the time of human life is finite. As part of Adam's punishment, God says: "In the sweat of thy face shall thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3, 19).

Shakespeare continues the idea of death being a debt in King Henry IV, Part 1, where Prince Hal says to Falstaff "Why, thou owest God a death". It is God to whom Shakespeare describes the debt as owing but Freud repeatedly misquotes this line, making the creditor Nature, not God. It is a line which captured for Freud something impressed upon him at an early age by his mother. Freud related to Jones that, when he was six, his mother had told him that he, like all people, was made of earth and must therefore one day return to earth. She provided evidence of this by rubbing her hands together and showing her son the dark rubbings of skin that came away as if they were pieces of earth. Freud told Jones that his astonishment at this was unbounded and that this was the first time that he sensed the inevitability of death. Freud goes on to put it: 'I slowly acquiesced in the idea I was later to hear expressed in the words, "Thou owest nature a death"' (Jones, 1972, p. 18).

Freud suggests that the mythological Fates and the closely connected Horae were created when we realized that we were subject to this fundamental law of nature that we must die. Thus, in 'The Theme of Three Caskets' (Freud, 1913c), Freud reads *The Merchant of Venice* and *King Lear* through the lens of Greek mythology which he then translates into metapsychology. He grounds the common theme of the three sisters, and the male hero's choice of the third, in the Fates and the Horae who preside

over the times of life, growth and the three seasons of the Greek year. Freud renders their names as 'What was', 'What is' and 'What shall be' (Freud, 1913c, p. 297 and footnote), bringing to mind the spirits of Christmas Past, Christmas Present and Christmas Future of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. The third sister, in reality the inexorable goddess of death, is converted into her opposite: the fairest, most beautiful and most desirable; the one whose hand is taken by choice, not compulsion:

Choice stands in the place of necessity, of destiny. In this way man overcomes death, which he has recognized intellectually. No greater triumph of wish-fulfilment is conceivable (Freud, 1913c, p. 299).

The myth represents a heterosexual account of the male temporal journey from birth to death:

We might argue that what is represented here are the three inevitable relations that a man has with a woman—the woman who bears him, the woman who is his mate and the woman who destroys him; or that they are the three forms taken by the figure of the mother in the course of a man's life—the mother herself, the beloved one who is chosen after her pattern, and lastly the Mother Earth who receives him once more. But it is in vain that an old man yearns for the love of woman as he had it first from his mother; the third of the Fates alone, the silent Goddess of Death, will take him into her arms (Freud, 1913c, p. 301).

It is perhaps fanciful to see Anaximander's influence overriding the Shakespearian text in Freud's recollection but interesting, nonetheless, to see Freud maintain the idea of the debt being owed to nature in the second part of his 'Thoughts for the Time on War and Death', which deals with our attitude towards death. He writes: "To anyone who has listened, we were of course prepared to maintain that death was the necessary outcome of life, that everyone owes nature a death and must expect to pay the debt" (Freud, 1915c, p. 289). Similarly, in a letter to Fliess about Schiff, who had been deceived about the extent of his illness, Freud writes: "But what has the individual come to, how negligible must be the influence of the religion of science, which is supposed to have taken the place of the old religion, if one no longer dares to disclose that it is this or that man's turn to die? Breuer's spirit lives in these arts. The Christian at least has the last sacrament administered a few hours beforehand. And Shakespeare says, 'Thou owest Nature a death.' I hope that when my time comes, I shall find someone who will treat me with greater respect and tell me when to be ready" (Freud, 1899b, pp. 343 - 344). It is not clear whether he did find the greater respect for which

he hoped: in one of his last letters to Princess Bonaparte, Freud writes: “The people around have tried to wrap me in an atmosphere of optimism: the cancer is shrinking; the reactions to the treatment are temporary. I don't believe any of it, and don't like being deceived” (Freud's letter to Marie Bonaparte of 28<sup>th</sup> April, 1939, cited in Jones, 1957, p. 257). It was Freud who had to tell others that he was ready to die. Jones relates that, two days before his death, Freud spoke to his doctor: “ ‘My dear Schur, you remember our first talk. You promised me then you would help me when I could no longer carry on. It is only torture now and it has no longer any sense’. Schur promised to give him sedation and did so the next day. Freud died the following day, September 23, 1939” (Jones, 1957, pp. 262 – 263).

Freud did not countenance any return to life after death. This is made particularly clear in a response he made in 1917 to a letter from Ferenczi who was concerned about Freud's health. “I smiled at your optimism in a downright superior fashion. You appear to believe in an “eternal return of the same” and to want to overlook entirely the unambiguous downward direction of the curve. There is certainly nothing noteworthy in the fact that a man of my age recognizes the unavoidable stepwise decay of his being” (Freud 1917d, pp. 251 – 252). The recognition to which Freud refers in his letter to Ferenczi of the “unavoidable stepwise decay of his being” is clearly a conscious recognition. As part of its timeless state, the unconscious continues under a different logic to believe itself immortal.

What, we ask, is the attitude of our unconscious towards the problem of death? The answer must be: almost exactly the same as that of *primaeval* man. In this respect, as in many others, the man of prehistoric times survives unchanged in our unconscious. Our unconscious, then, does not believe in its own death; it behaves as if it were immortal. What we call our ‘unconscious’—the deepest strata of our minds, made up of instinctual impulses—knows nothing that is negative, and no negation; in it contradictories coincide. For that reason it does not know its own death, for to that we can give only a negative content. Thus there is nothing instinctual in us which responds to a belief in death (Freud, 1915d, p. 296).

As I discuss further in the next chapter, this is one of the ways in which Freud's idea of the timelessness of the unconscious might be understood: in terms of its failure to grasp that our time is finite. Any expectation of a debt due, of repayment for life with death, of the price for brief and stolen time being total extinction, has to be a conscious expectation only. I think it follows that, for Freud, time is something we

obtain in exchange for consciously giving up the idea of our existence being without end.

Freud's reading of Anaximander in *Totem and Taboo*, that we emerge from the *apeiron* at the price of an inevitable return to it, is, I think, evident in his theory of the death drive expressed seven years later in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud, 1920). As I discuss in the next chapter, the aim of the death drive is to pull the living back to an inorganic state of timelessness and to negate (Freud, 1925b, pp. 238 – 239; Freud, 1938a, pp. 148 – 149). Freud's discovery of the death drive led to his praise of another Presocratic philosopher, Empedocles, whose theory of the duality of love and strife Freud found in principal identical to his own theory of the dual drives of Eros and destructiveness.

### *Empedocles*

By way of introduction to Empedocles, it makes sense to look first at Heraclitus and Parmenides, two philosophers who succeeded the Milesians and had an important indirect influence on Freud through their immediate influence on Empedocles and Plato. Freud makes only oblique reference to Heraclitus, and none at all to Parmenides but both Heraclitus and Parmenides feature prominently in two of Freud's Greek secondary literature sources: Gomperz' *Griechische Denker* [*Greek Thinkers: A History of Ancient Philosophy*]; and Wilhelm Capelle's 1935 work, *Die Vorsokratiker* [*The Presocratics*](Alfred Kröner, Leipzig, 1935), which Freud acknowledges as his source for the references he makes to Empedocles in 'Analysis Terminable and Interminable' (Freud, 1937a).

Gomperz, in the volume of *Greek Thinkers* which remains in Freud's library, claims that: "the 'speculative' revels of Heraclitus may be regarded by us as the source of the most precious contribution with which he has enriched the treasury of human knowledge" (Gomperz, 1905, p. 69). Gomperz describes Heraclitus as follows:

Heraclitus was the first of the philosophers of Greece [...] by whom the counting board, the measuring-board, and the drawing board were alike eschewed. Without using his hands in any way, he devoted himself entirely to speculation, and the really remarkable fertility of his mind is still a source of instruction and refreshment. At the same time he was a mere philosopher, in the less complimentary sense of the term (Gomperz, 1905, p. 59).

I looked earlier at the efforts Freud made, especially in relation to his ideas on time, to keep his own speculative tendencies under tight control. It seems to me, in the light of Gomperz' description of Heraclitus above, that Heraclitus' speculative bent might have been too extreme for Freud to see in him a worthy predecessor and that there is evidence here of André Green's view that: "Freud, however revolutionary he was, remained a rationalist and was trained to think like Plato and Kant rather than like Heraclitus and Hegel" (Green, 1975, p. 359). It may have been Freud's desire to avoid association with Heraclitus that his only reference to him was by way of the jocular aside at the 1908 meeting of the Viennese Psychoanalytic Society to which I referred above where Freud suggests that it would be more amusing than provable to suggest "that Heraclitus, on account of his auditory hallucinations and his sense of orderliness, was an analerotic" (Nunberg and Federn, 1974, p. 150 as cited in Hoffer, 1965, p. 378)<sup>26</sup>.

Freud makes no mention of Heraclitus' philosophy<sup>27</sup>. Jung, however, acknowledges Heraclitus' importance: "Old Heraclitus, who was indeed a very great sage, discovered the most marvellous of all psychological laws: the regulative function of opposites" (Jung, 1992, p. 72). The marvellous law to which Jung refers is Heraclitus' principle of the unity of opposites and his doctrine of flux both of which follow from Heraclitus' radical view that there is no underlying *archê*: change is all there is. Reality itself is constituted by ceaseless transformative activity, the transformations a consequence of the conflicting drives within objects and governed by the principle of the unity of opposites. The principle of the unity of opposites which governs the ceaseless flux provides that each object is subject to opposing forces creating an inherent dynamic tension within it. Heraclitus uses a stringed instrument to provide an analogy: "what is diverging is converging with itself: there is a back-stretched connection, as of a bow and of a lyre" (36: B51 = 27M in Barnes, 2000, p. 60). Where the tension is disordered, the object of which the opposed forces are

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<sup>26</sup> There are no obvious references to Heraclitus having had auditory hallucinations. There is, however, a reference in this context by Nietzsche, whom Freud claimed not to have read (Freud 1914b, pp. 15 – 16). Nietzsche attributes auditory hallucinations to Socrates in *Twilight of the Idols*: "And let us not forget those auditory hallucinations which, as 'Socrates' demon', have been interpreted in a religious sense" (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 31).

<sup>27</sup> Bergman detects certain aspects of Heraclitus' philosophy in Freud's work, suggesting that Heraclitus anticipates Freud's views on the internal world of phantasy and dreams (Bergmann, 1966, p. 359).

constitutive parts will die; where there is equilibrium, harmonious function will follow. On Heraclitus' doctrine of flux, Gomperz, through whom we might infer Freud read Heraclitus, says:

[Heraclitus] watched the circulation of matter, as visible in the animal kingdoms, and the fact impressed him so strongly that he used its analogy as the leading principle of all his reflections on material processes. All life was continual decomposition and renewal[...]. Hence derived Heraclitus' doctrine of the flux of things. It was a mere optical delusion if we looked on anything as stationary: the thing was actually subject to incessant transformation. His favourite simile was that of the flowing stream. "We cannot step into the same river twice, for fresh and ever fresh waters are pouring into it" (Gomperz, 1905, p. 66).

Hence the famous attribution of the dictum 'panta rhei' or 'everything flows' to Heraclitus<sup>28</sup>. According to Aristotle, Heraclitus' doctrine of flux had a profound influence on Plato: "Plato, having in his youth become familiar with Cratylus and the Heraclitean doctrine that all sensible things are ever in a state of flux and there is no knowledge about them, continued to hold those views in later years" (Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, A 6, in Cornford, 1997, p. 29).

Parmenides ridiculed Heraclitus and took the diametrically opposed view: that there is no such thing as real change. What we know of Parmenides is largely drawn from what remains of his poem *On Nature*. The poem is in two parts, each part representing a possible line of enquiry into the nature of reality: the first, the easier path, is the Way of Opinion/Appearance, trodden by the majority of us who take our senses to be a reliable guide to the nature of reality (Heraclitus is portrayed by Parmenides as one of these foolish types); the second, the superior Way of Truth, provides a route to a 'true' understanding of reality which avoids dependence on perceptions which are by their nature unreliable. This path leads to an understanding of the truth of

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<sup>28</sup> Plato's Cratylus has it that: "Heraclitus, you know, says that everything moves on and that nothing is at rest; and, comparing existing things to the flow of a river, he says that you could not step into the same river twice" (Plato, *Cratylus*, 402A). According to Aristotle, Cratylus carried this idea further still: "Seeing that the whole of nature is in motion, and that nothing is true of what is changing, they supposed that it is not possible to speak truly of what is changing in absolutely all respects. For from this belief flowered the most extreme opinion of those I have mentioned — that of those who say they 'Heraclitize', and such was held by Cratylus, who in the end thought one should say nothing and only moved his finger, and reproached Heraclitus for saying that you cannot step in the same river twice — for he himself thought you could not do so even once" (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1010a 7-15).



Parmenides' claim that everything that is always has been and always will be. There is no room for change: what is, is; what is not, is not<sup>29</sup>.

Heraclitus and Parmenides represent either side of the philosophical problem of change and permanency, something which might be seen reflected in Freud's ideas of the indestructibility of the timeless unconscious as opposed the transience of consciousness, both of which I discuss in more detail in the next chapter. Empedocles, the philosopher whom Freud lauded as "one of the great thinkers of ancient Greece" (Freud 1937a, pp. 244 – 245), reconciled the notions of constant flux in Heraclitus' theory and of permanence in Parmenides' in a theory embraced by Freud.

Freud visited Empedocles' birthplace, Agrigento, in 1910 and went on to rank Empedocles as "one of the grandest and most remarkable figures in the history of Greek civilization", admiringly referring to his "cosmic speculations of astonishingly imaginative boldness" (Freud, 1937a p. 245). The reason for Freud's admiration becomes very quickly clear: Freud saw reflected in Empedocles' theory of the duality of love and discord his own theory concerning the dual drives of Eros and destructiveness.

Freud's major reference to Empedocles is contained in 'Analysis Terminable and Interminable' (Freud, 1937a), the paper in which Freud finds the death drive at work in its resistance to recovery in analysis. In addition to the negative therapeutic reaction, Freud had recognised the death drive in the sense of guilt, the masochistic need for punishment and the tyrannical super-ego of melancholia. These phenomena indicated to Freud the presence of an aggressive or destructive power in mental life, a concept which was met with serious resistance, as Freud both anticipated and acknowledged. Freud, aware that this aspect of his theorizing was unlikely to endear him immediately to his audience, turns to Empedocles as a renowned forebear who shared his views.

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<sup>29</sup> Lacan calls Parmenides' claim 'stupid'. In *Encore* Lacan says: "It is precisely because he was a poet that Parmenides says what he has to say to us in the least stupid of manners. Otherwise, the idea that being is and that nonbeing is not, I don't know what that means to you, but personally I find that stupid" (Jacques Lacan, *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan Book XX*, p22, cited in Alain Badiou's 'Lacan and the Pre-Socratics' at <http://www.lacan.com/badpre.htm>; accessed 7/9/2012).

I am well aware that the dualistic theory according to which an instinct of death or of destruction or aggression claims equal rights as a partner with Eros as manifested in the libido, has found little sympathy and has not really been accepted even among psychoanalysts. This made me all the more pleased when not long ago I came upon this theory of mine in the writings of one of the great thinkers of ancient Greece. I am very ready to give up the prestige of originality for the sake of such a confirmation, especially as I can never be certain, in view of the wide extent of my reading in early years, whether what I took for a new creation might not be an effect of cryptomnesia (Freud, 1937a, pp. 244 – 45)<sup>30</sup>.

Freud goes on to make a telling differentiation between his and Empedocles' theory: Freud grants his own “biological validity” but claims that Empedocles' is “cosmic phantasy” only. Empedocles' theory “approximates so closely to the psychoanalytic theory of the instincts that we should be tempted to maintain that the two are identical, if it were not for the difference that the Greek philosopher's theory is a cosmic phantasy while ours is content to claim biological validity” (Freud, 1937a, p. 245). Hanna Segal, in her paper, ‘On the Clinical Usefulness of the Concept of Death Instinct’, suggests that Freud’s differentiation might provide another example of Freud’s deflection of disapproval: “I think that Freud emphasises the biological aspect which later allowed others, and sometimes himself, to describe his ideas about the death instinct as a biological speculation, partly defensively; he expected that his new idea would be found shocking and meet with great resistance, which, indeed, it did” (Segal, 1993, p. 55).

Empedocles’ theory is contained in *On Nature*, his style something which Richard Armstrong, in *A Compulsion for Antiquity: Freud and the Ancient World*, suggests was in itself attractive to Freud for it brings together science and myth, that is, both elements of *Forscher* and *Mystiker*: “Writing in Homeric hexameters, Empedocles successfully grounded his theory in the rhetorical voice of the mythological tradition, something Freud could admire in that it brings scientific theory close in line with the ‘primary process’ thinking of mythology” (Armstrong, 2005, p. 95).

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<sup>30</sup> Freud makes a similar allusion to Empedocles in a footnote to the chapter on ‘The theory of the instincts’ in *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis* (Freud, 1938a): “This picture of the basic forces or instincts, which still arouses much opposition among analysts, was already familiar to the philosopher Empedocles of Acragas” (Freud, 1938a, p. 149).

Empedocles' theory took the eternal alternation of love and strife (or discord) to be a fundamental universal law. When love reigns, the elements peacefully commingle in a perfect sphere. As strife asserts itself and overcomes love, the elements disperse, free to obey their tendency of like attracting like until love increases sufficiently in power to overcome strife, bringing the elements together again to unite in substances of different natures. In the flows and counter-flows of love and strife all things are created and pleasure and pain follow:

For out of these are all things formed and fitted together, and by these do men think and feel pleasure and pain (Empedocles, *On Nature*, Verse 107, in Burnet, 1920, p. 220)<sup>31</sup>.

It is Empedocles' principles of love and strife which Freud takes to be identical to the drives of Eros and destructiveness:

The two fundamental principles of Empedocles – *φιλία* and *νίκος* – [love and strife] are, both in name and function, the same as our two primal instincts, *Eros* and *destructiveness*, the first of which endeavours to combine what exists into ever greater unities, while the second endeavours to dissolve those combinations and to destroy the structures to which they have given rise" (Freud, 1937a, p. 246).

For Empedocles, as organic life is composed of elements necessarily in combination, life is annihilated whenever each of love or discord reaches its zenith. For Freud, the phenomena of life require both drives, too. In 'Analysis Terminable and Interminable', he expresses it like this: "Only by the concurrent or mutually opposing action of the two primal instincts—Eros and the death-instinct—, never by one or the other alone, can we explain the rich multiplicity of the phenomena of life" (Freud, 1937a, p. 243). In *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, Freud expresses the same point like this:

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<sup>31</sup> The first volume of Freud's collection of Gomperz' *Greek Thinkers* contains a chapter on Empedocles (Gomperz, 1905, pp. 230 et seq). Freud, however, only explicitly acknowledges Wilhelm Capelle's 1935 work, *Die Vorsokratiker: die fragmente und quellenberichte ubersetzt und eingeleitet von Wilhelm Capelle* [*The Presocratics: fragments and source material*] (now out of print), as his secondary source for the references he makes to Empedocles in "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" (Freud, 1937a, p. 245, footnote). Capelle based his work on Hermann Diels' translation of Empedocles' surviving verses (Leupold-Löwenthal, 1988, p. 265). Hermann Diels' translation is also to be found in the fifth chapter of Burnet's *Early Greek Philosophy* (Burnet, 1920), which was my reference source.

In biological functions the two basic functions operate against each other or combine with each other. [...]. This concurrent and mutually opposing action of the two basic instincts gives rise to the whole variegation of the phenomena of life. The analogy of our two basic instincts extends from the sphere of living things to the pair of opposing forces—attraction and repulsion—which rule in the inorganic world (Freud, 1938a, p. 149).

Empedocles claimed that all things are created in the flows and counter-flows of love and strife. Similarly, Freud claimed that the interplay of the drives "dominates all of life's riddles" (Freud, 1922, p. 339), that all of the phenomena of life arise as a consequence of the interaction of the life and death drives, drives in principle identical to the principles of love and strife put forward by Empedocles more than 2,000 years ago. How does time, one of the most fundamental riddles of all, fit in with this interplay? Empedocles' principles are timeless in the sense that they endure:

For even as they (Strife and Love) were aforetime, so too they shall be; nor ever, methinks, will boundless time be emptied of that pair (Empedocles, *On Nature*, Verse 16, in Burnet, 1920, p. 207).

For Empedocles, time is that in which things come to be by virtue of the action of love and strife on the eternal elements. Here, then, is an important difference between Empedocles' principles and Freud's drives, one which is not acknowledged by Freud. For, as I show in the next chapter, in a detailed examination of the role of the drives in the temporal process, the drives pull us to timelessness, not time, and it is in accordance with Freud's theory to take into account more than just the interaction of the drives to understand how we come to a notion of abstract time. I show that it is only through the operation of the reality principle, which represents the external world, that the necessary rhythm is established between the two opposing drives of Eros and destruction for a sense of time to emerge.

### *Plato*

Empedocles had a significant influence on Plato, whose concept of Eros Freud claimed "coincides exactly with the love-force, the libido of psychoanalysis" (Freud, 1921a, p. 91). Others disagree: the Greek scholar, Francis Cornford, suggests that, rather than exact coincidence, Plato's and Freud's notions of Eros are diametrically opposed, Plato's Eros being spiritual and eternal, whereas Freud's Eros expresses "the instinct of the flesh" (Cornford, 1967, pp. 78 - 79). Freud seems, as he does with Empedocles, to defer to Plato to gain the beneficial support of Plato's academic

stature, Freud again seeking to deflect the adverse reaction of his audience, this time to his view of human nature. The 1920 preface to the 4<sup>th</sup> Edition of Freud's *Three Essays on Sexuality* (Freud, 1905b), for example, contains the claim that Freud's views on sexuality, which some might perceive as base, were in fact equivalent with those of 'divine' Plato: "And as for the 'stretching' of the concept of sexuality which has been necessitated by the analysis of children and what are called perverts, anyone who looks down with contempt upon psycho-analysis from a superior vantage-point should remember how closely the enlarged sexuality of psycho-analysis coincides with the Eros of the divine Plato" (Freud, 1905b, p. 134).

Freud manages to walk the fine line between claiming similarities between his own theories and those of his ancient Greek sources at the same time as claiming originality of thought. In his 'Autobiographical Study', for example, Freud claims: "I [was not] then aware that in deriving hysteria from sexuality I was going back to the very beginnings of medicine and following up a thought of Plato's. It was not until later that I learnt this from an essay by Havelock Ellis" (Freud, 1925e, p. 24)<sup>32</sup>. Freud's desire for originality might lie behind his failure to acknowledge that, in addition to Eros being common to both Plato's philosophy and Freud's theory of psychoanalysis, there are similarities, too, between Plato's topography of the tripartite soul and Freud's topography of mind. Plato's concupiscence, whose drive is for physical pleasure, is similar to the id; the spirited part of the soul, whose drive is for honourable ambition, is similar to the (benign) superego; and the rational part of the soul, with a drive for wisdom, is similar to the ego. It is, of course, their temporal qualities which differentiate Plato's concept of soul and Freud's concept of mind: for Plato, the soul is immortal, so the domain from which it comes and to which it returns is eternal; for Freud, the id wrongly believes itself to be immortal and the state to which the death drive pulls it is extinction.

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<sup>32</sup> Freud refers Havelock Ellis' article, 'Hysteria in Relation to the Sexual Emotions', which appeared in the October 1898 edition of the in *St. Louis Alienist and Neurologist*, in a letter to Fliess of 3<sup>rd</sup> January, 1899: "Something pleasant about which I had meant to write you yesterday was sent to me — from Gibraltar by a Mr. Havelock Ellis, an author who concerns himself with the topic of sex and is obviously a highly intelligent man because his paper, which appeared in *Alienist and Neurologist* (October 1898) and deals with the connection between hysteria and sexual life, begins with Plato and ends with Freud; he agrees a great deal with the latter and gives *Studies on Hysteria*, as well as later papers, their due in a very sensible manner" (Freud, 1899, pp. 338 -339).

The *Timaeus*, in which Plato sets out his philosophy of time, contains a description of the immortal soul's entry into the mortal body as being so stimulated by the excitations from the external world that it desires nothing more than to reduce the excitation and return to its original state (*Timaeus* 44Af). This is very similar to Freud's idea of the death drive as expressed in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that: "*an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces*" (Freud, 1920, p. 36, his emphasis).

Plato's *Timaeus* was the only one of Plato's dialogues known in the West until after the Middle Ages so is of significant historical importance in its influence on both ancient and medieval thought. The *Timaeus* contains Plato's cosmology where, for the first time in Greek philosophy, the idea of a divine and benevolent creator is introduced: a 'demiurge', or master craftsman, whose aim is to create the cosmos like a work of art, using the world of Forms as his model<sup>33</sup>. Plato suggests that, before time, there was only Being, Becoming and Space. Being is eternal, existing outside time, inhabited by eternal Forms, and intelligible only to reason. Being and Space together provide the necessary conditions for the realm of Becoming, which is the world of perception, of things coming to be, changing and ending but never having the tenseless, timeless quality of Being. As the realm of change, Becoming is also the realm of time. Plato's demiurge creates the stars, the planets and Earth, imposing geometric order using the four primary elements: fire, air, earth and water. His cosmos is based on the Form of Living Being, so is alive, being animated by soul, and is unique. It is spherical, because the sphere is a perfect shape. It cannot be eternal, as a Form is, because it came into being, rather than having always existed. But, having time, it is as much like a Form, as close to being eternal, as it can be.

When the father who had begotten it saw it set in motion and alive, a shrine brought into being for the everlasting gods, he rejoiced and being well pleased he took thought to make it yet more like its pattern. So, as that pattern is the Living Being that is for ever existent, he sought to make this universe also like it, so far as might be, in that respect. Now the nature of that Living Being was

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<sup>33</sup> Forms are described in *The Phaedo* as "incomposite" (78c7) "unvarying and constant" (78d6), "eternal" (79d2), and "divine, immortal and wise" (81a5). Forms are outside space (*Phaedrus* 247c) and time (*Timaeus* 37e-38a) and do not become but simply are (*Timaeus* 27d3-28a3). Each Form is unique.

eternal, and this character it was impossible to confer in full completeness on the generated thing. But he took thought to make, as it were, a moving likeness of eternity; and, at the same time that he ordered the Heaven, he made of eternity that abides in unity, an everlasting likeness moving according to number – that to which we have given the name Time (*Timaeus* 37c).

Plato expands his lovely description of time being a “moving likeness of eternity” into an idea of time constituting a heavenly clock whose movements are its measure.

In virtue, then, of this plan and intent of the god for the birth of Time, in order that Time might be brought into being, Sun and Moon, and five other stars – ‘wanderers’ as they are called – were made to define and preserve the numbers of time. ... And so people are all but ignorant of the fact that time really is the wanderings of these bodies (*Timaeus* 38c).

Plato thus makes time celestial motion. Did this idea have any influence on Freud? There are no references to the dialogue in Freud’s works and it is impossible to establish whether Freud actually read it. A German edition of Plato’s *Symposium* is the only remaining work of Plato in Freud’s library (Mitchell-Boyask, 1984, p. 28). Gomperz’ *Griechische Denker* [*Greek Thinkers: A History of Ancient Philosophy*] also in the library, devotes a volume solely to Plato but, although it gives the *Symposium* (discussed below) a chapter of its own, mention of the *Timaeus* is limited to a discussion only of its possible place in the chronological ordering of Plato’s works (Gomperz, 2012, Vol II, p. 304; p. 308). In his paper, ‘Empedocles and Freud, Heraclitus and Jung’ (Tourney, 1956), Tourney claims that Freud was an “avid” reader of Plato (Tourney, 1956, p. 110) so one might assume from this that Freud’s reading included this important dialogue. But the source for Tourney’s claim is Jones’ biography and the page in Jones to which Tourney refers tells us instead that Freud remarked in 1933 that his knowledge of Plato was not avid but “very fragmentary” (Jones, 1972, p. 62). I tracked this remark down to a hearsay recollection provided in a paper by Dr Siegfried Bernfeld, a member of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, on ‘Freud’s Scientific Beginnings’ (Bernfeld, 1949), which concludes with the line: “In a conversation about Plato Freud admitted in 1933 that his knowledge of Plato’s philosophy was very fragmentary but that he had been greatly impressed by his theory of anamnesis and that he had, at one time, given it a great deal of thought” (Bernfeld, 1949, p. 193). The footnote gives Bernfeld’s source as being a “personal communication from Mrs. Suzanne Bernfeld” (Bernfeld, 1949, p. 193, footnote). Suzanne Bernfeld was Bernfeld’s wife. Tourney’s claim of Freud’s “avid” reading of Plato is thus based on a wrong reading of rather unreliable hearsay.

Freud might have become aware of the *Timaeus* in his work translating J S Mill's essay on Plato from English to German under Gomperz' supervision at the University of Vienna<sup>34</sup>. The volume remains in Freud's library and includes essays on socialism, labour and the emancipation of women in addition to Mill's essay on Plato. Jones dismisses the possibility that Mill's essay had any influence on Freud's writings: "This was the only work, original or translation, he ever published that had no connection with his scientific interests, and, although the content of the book probably appealed to him, his main motive was undoubtedly to kill time and, incidentally, earn a little money" (Jones, 1953, p. 55). Tourney provides a different view in his paper, 'Freud and the Greeks: A study of the influence of classical Greek mythology and philosophy upon the development of Freudian thought', where he summarises those of the Platonic themes in Mill's paper reflected in Freud's own work (the doctrine of hedonism, where pleasure and the absence of pain constitute Plato's 'Measuring art'; Plato's division of mind into Reason, Spirit or Passion, and Appetite; and the concept of Necessity). Tourney points out that Mill makes no reference to Empedocles' concepts of Love and Strife or to Plato's *Symposium* (Tourney, 1965, p. 69, footnote). I can add that Mill's essay contains only three references to the *Timaeus* and that none of these are relevant to Plato's theory of time.

The question of whether Freud read the *Timaeus* is therefore impossible to answer. My view is that, however, in the context of a discussion of Freud's theory of temporality, the answer, one way or another, does not really matter because Freud would have had no interest in that side of Plato's philosophy which requires a demiurge to set the heavenly bodies spinning. This is very much the sort of cosmic phantasy for which Freud disparaged Empedocles. Freud had no need for Plato's cosmological philosophy. I suggest that Plato's influence on Freud's theory of time is more subtle, evident in Freud's use of myth as a means through which to express profound ideas. As Guthrie says of Plato but might equally have said of Freud: "A mature religious thinker like Plato may choose it [myth] deliberately, and as the

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<sup>34</sup> Freud's translation formed part of the German collected edition of J S Mill's works edited by Gomperz. The English version is contained within *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill, Volume XI - Essays on Philosophy and the Classics* (Mill, 1978). Michael Molnar provides an interesting account of Freud's faithful translation and of the possible influence of Mill on Freud (and that of another British philosopher, Sir William Hamilton) in his paper, 'John Stuart Mill Translated by Sigmund Freud' in *Psychoanalysis and History*, Volume 1, 1999, pp. 195 – 205).



culmination of reasoned argument, to communicate experiences and beliefs, the reality and cogency of which is a matter of conviction outrunning logical proof. This is genuine myth and its validity and importance are undoubted (Guthrie, 1962, p. 2). In what follows, I show Freud's changing use of the myth expressed by Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium* (or *Dinner Party*), Plato's dialogue to do with the nature of love, to find eventually support for the death drive which pulls us to timelessness.

### *Plato's Symposium*

The setting for Plato's *Symposium* is a dinner party for which Agathos, a tragic poet, is host and to which Socrates and Aristodemus arrive late. One guest, Eryximachus, a doctor, suggests that, rather than employ flute girls, the men should provide their own entertainment, each member of the company to give a speech in praise of love. Phaedrus, Pausanias, Eryximachus, Aristophanes, Agathon and Socrates then deliver their respective speeches. The first speeches, of Phaedrus and Pausanias, treat love in the sense of physical desire only. Aristophanes' turn should come after Pausanias but he has hiccoughs so the doctor, Eryximachus, prescribes for this and takes his turn instead. The pompous doctor's rather pedestrian speech gives another perspective, that of the Empedoclean view of Eros as a cosmic force of unity and harmony. Aristophanes then speaks. To explain love, Aristophanes relates the myth that there were originally three sexes: man; woman; and an androgynous combination of both sexes. Each person was a perfectly formed circle with twice as many body parts as we have now (so with four hands, two faces etc.). The Greek gods were fearful of the strength of these people, which lay in their circular perfection, and their lack of desire, and so Zeus cut each person in two. Zeus then took pity on the divided halves, and so transplanted their genitals to the front of the person with the view that sex might make their loss tolerable. From then on, the divided halves have sought their counterparts: on the homosexual side, the divided males have sought other males and the divided females other females; in the heterosexual search for union, men and women seek each other. Having concluded his account, Aristophanes makes way for Socrates who refutes the arguments of both Eryximachus and Aristophanes. Alcibiades then arrives with a bunch of drunken revellers and gives a speech in praise of Socrates. Another party of revellers arrives and the drinking continues. Some

guests collapse; some leave; Aristodemus falls asleep. When Aristodemus wakes up, he finds Socrates still talking and drinking with Agathon and Aristophanes: then, even they succumb to sleep and Socrates leaves with Aristodemus, Socrates still sober and fresh as a daisy.

It is to Aristophanes' speech on love that Freud makes three different and contradictory references: in his *Three Essays on Sexuality* (Freud, 1905b, p136; in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud, 1920, pp. 57 - 58); and in the *Outline of Psychoanalysis* (Freud, 1938a, p. 148). According to most interpretations, Aristophanes presents the myth, which shows that there can be attraction between both like and unlike, in jest. Freud, however, seems to assume a straightforward presentation and makes several mistakes in his allusions to the myth. His first, in his *Three Essays on Sexuality*, suggests a reading of Plato which distorts the myth completely, Freud introducing his discussion of homosexuality by suggesting that there was only one original sex which was divided into male and female:

The popular view of the sexual instinct is beautifully reflected in the poetic fable which tells how the original human beings were cut up into two halves—man and woman—and how these are always striving to unite again in love. It comes as a great surprise therefore to learn that there are men whose sexual object is a man and not a woman, and women whose sexual object is a woman and not a man (Freud, 1905b, p. 136).

Freud's second reference to Aristophanes' speech comes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud, 1920) where Freud is describing the lack of scientific evidence to draw on in a discussion of the origin of sexuality. He describes the lack as “a darkness into which not so much as a ray of a hypothesis has penetrated” (Freud, 1920, p. 57), and goes on to contrast this lack with the explanation provided by the myth recounted by Aristophanes. “In quite a different region, it is true, we *do* meet with such a hypothesis; but it is of so fantastic a kind—a myth rather than a scientific explanation—that I should not venture to produce it here, were it not that it fulfils precisely the one condition whose fulfilment we desire. For it traces the origin of an instinct to *a need to restore an earlier state of things*” (ibid). This time, Freud recounts the myth accurately:

What I have in mind is, of course, the theory which Plato put into the mouth of Aristophanes in the *Symposium*, and which deals not only with the origin of the sexual instinct but also with the most important of its variations in relation to its object. ‘The original human nature was not like the present, but different.

In the first place, the sexes were originally three in number, not two as they are now; there was man, woman, and the union of the two....' Everything about these primaeval men was double: they had four hands and four feet, two faces, two privy parts, and so on. Eventually Zeus decided to cut these men in two, 'like a sorb-apple which is halved for pickling'. After the division had been made, 'the two parts of man, each desiring his other half, came together, and threw their arms about one another eager to grow into one' (Freud, 1920, pp. 57 -58).

Freud claims that the myth provides support for his own notion that the drives seek to "*to restore an earlier state of things*" (ibid, Freud's emphasis): sexuality is a coming together of material in an attempt to fulfil this condition of Eros. Freud says in the footnote that "Plato would not have adopted a story of this kind which had somehow reached him through some oriental tradition—to say nothing of giving it so important a place—unless it had struck him as containing an element of truth" (ibid, p. 57, footnote). This suggests two things: that Freud is overlooking the general view that the myth is in fact being proffered in jest by Aristophanes as an explanation for love so that Socrates can later refute it; and that it is Freud, not Plato, who needs the myth to be true, to provide confirmation of Freud's theory of the drives' urge to restore an earlier state. Plato's joke becomes Freud's implicit authority for this principle of the drives:

Shall we follow the hint given us by the poet-philosopher, and venture upon the hypothesis that living substance at the time of its coming to life was torn apart into small particles, which have ever since endeavoured to reunite through the sexual instincts? [...] But here, I think, the moment has come for breaking off (Freud, 1920, p. 58).

And Freud leaves it there, having cleverly brought in Plato to bolster his theory of the death drive in a way which depends on Freud's particular and unusual reading of the myth expressed by Aristophanes. It is a point well made by Armstrong that it is not so much the 1905 misunderstanding by Freud of Plato which is important; rather, it is Freud's move from his 1905 position to Freud's use of the same dialogue in 1920 to make Plato an intellectual authority who underpins Freud's developing theory of the death instinct (Armstrong, 2005, p. 46). Armstrong does not, however, note the point that Freud in 1920 is using the myth to support his notion that *all* drives seek to restore an earlier state of things whereas, in the later *Outline* (Freud, 1938a), Freud changes his view. The death drive continues to act in accordance with Freud's formula that drives tends towards a return to an earlier state: inanimate matter preceded living things and the final aim of the death drive is "to lead what is living

into an inorganic state” (Freud, 1938a, p. 148). But now Freud claims that Eros cannot fit in with this formula. If it did, Freud says, we would have to assume that “living substance was once a unity which had later been torn apart and was now striving towards re-union” (ibid, p. 149), i.e., make the assumption that Freud himself made in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. But, whereas Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* looked to the myth of the third sex to validate his assumption, in the *Outline*, he uses the same allusion in a more disparaging way, putting the myth into the same category as Empedocles’ theory of love and strife: as being phantasy lacking biological validity: “Creative writers have imagined something of the sort, but nothing like it is known to us from the actual history of living substance” (ibid).

Freud’s ability to cherry pick from his Greek philosophical sources has been apparent throughout this chapter but nowhere more, I think, than in his different uses of the myth of the third sex. In the final analysis, where the myth is important to Freud is in its illustration of the pull of the death drive to an earlier state of things. This supports my view that Plato’s influence on Freud’s theory of time was a subtle one: Freud drew not on Plato’s own theory of time but on Plato’s use of myth as a means through which to express profound ideas of temporality.

This sense of Freud turning away from developing Greek philosophy, back to myth, is further in evidence when consideration is given to Aristotle, Plato’s most famous pupil.

### *Aristotle*

Freud makes several references to some of Aristotle’s major works and the breadth of both Aristotle’s and Freud’s interests can be seen in his allusions to Aristotle on ethics, eels, sex and dreams. As a medical student, Freud praises Aristotle's *Ethica Nicomachaea* (Freud, 1874a, p. 49) and a little later confirms that he is drawing on Aristotle’s work on eels for his own research (Freud, 1876). Freud uses Aristotle's phrase "Omne animal post coitum triste" from *De generatione animalium*, to suggest that a minor melancholia might always follow from sex (Freud, 1894c, p. 94). And he refers to Aristotle’s work on dreams, *De divinatione per somnum*, and *De somniis* in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in the *Introductory Lectures* and in the *New Introductory Lectures* to make the point that Aristotle was aware of the internal

source of dreams, rather than making the assumption that dreams are god-given (Freud, 1900, pp. 2- 3; p33; p. 97; Freud, 1916b, p. 88; and Freud, 1933, p. 16). The importance of Aristotle on dreams to Freud was made explicit in his acceptance speech for the 1930 Goethe Prize, read by his daughter, Anna, as Freud was too frail to attend. Freud acknowledged that psychoanalysis' recognition of the unconscious was built on "the ancient, venerable and incontestably correct pronouncement of Aristotle—that dreaming is the continuation of our mental activity into the state of sleep" (Freud, 1930b, p. 209).

Freud was also appreciative of Aristotle's definition of tragedy as "effecting through pity and fear the purification [*katharsis*] of such emotions" (*Poetics*, 49b27f), something he touches on in 'Psychopathic Characters on the Stage' (Freud, 1906, p. 305). I have looked in previous chapters at Freud's claim that catharsis was "the first step to the psycho-analytic method" (Freud, 1919b, p. 208). It is relevant here to reiterate the point I made in the Introduction that Freud's copy of Gomperz' translation of Aristotle's *Poetics* includes an essay by Von Berger on *Truth & Error in Aristotle's Catharsis Theory* in which Von Berger comments that: "the Cathartic Treatment of Hysteria, which the physicians Dr Josef Breuer and Dr Sigmund Freud have described, is very appropriate for making the Cathartic theory of tragedy understandable" (as cited in Mitchell-Boyask, 1984, p. 29).

Aristotle's theory of time is contained in *Physics* where Aristotle defines time as "a number of change with respect to the before and after" (*Physics*, Book IV, 219 b 1-2). On the interpretation favoured by Ursula Coope in *Time for Aristotle* (Coope, 2005), Aristotle, like Plato, believes that only the things that come in and out of being can exist in time. These things are *in* time because there is a time before they came into existence and there is a time after they go out of existence. The finite time of their existence is measurable. Thus time for Aristotle seems to be that which can be counted. Coope confirms that Aristotle's definition of time being something countable requires a counter, that is, a mind/soul which can count. This is consistent with Aristotle's emphasis on empiricism, that is, that things are only known through our experience of them, and his insistence that reason needs to work with the material of these experiences, not in isolation. Freud makes no reference to Aristotle's theory of time, nor to his *Physics*. Having explored Freud's relationship with the

Presocratics, who, like Freud, combined speculation with empiricism, and Freud's use of Plato's myth rather than his cosmology, I sense that Freud would have found Aristotle's theory both helpful and unhelpful: helpful in its idea of counting what lies between the before and the after; unhelpful in its failure to consider the importance of the nature of the person doing the counting. The idea of counting the unit in between the before and the after is implicit within Freud's theory of time for he identified an important temporal link between the periodic nature of our engagement with the external world and our perception of that mode of intermittent operation:

[O]ur abstract idea of time seems to be wholly derived from the method of working of the system *Pcpt.-Cs.* and to correspond to a perception on its own part of that method of working (Freud, 1920, p. 28).

André Green captures the importance within Freud's theory of what goes on within the 'now' as it happens and the 'now' as it is experienced:

[B]y invoking the idea of discontinuity, [Freud] was postulating a moment of time 2 following an earlier moment of time 1. However, it is the relationship between  $t_1$  and  $t_2$  that is important. This should not be read in a purely regressive sense  $t_2 \rightarrow t_1$ . Why? Because the later moment does not exist in itself, in an isolated state. It only exists as a term of comparison with  $t_1$  seen backwards. [...] If one isolates any given fragment of time, it is clear that, in the very moment I take the time to identify it, the time I was speaking about no longer exists. [...] In other words the moment time is experienced and the moment it is designated never coincide (Green, 2002, pp. 63 - 64).

Where Freud departs from philosophy is his focus on the *counter* than the *counted*. This is why I sense that Aristotle's theory of time would have been unhelpful to Freud. Even if he had been aware of Aristotle's theory of time, something so empirical would not have resonated sufficiently with Freud whose speculations were drawing him towards a much more qualitative conclusion about time. As I explore in the next chapter, Freud needed his theory of time to encompass much more than a quantity which can be counted<sup>35</sup>. He needed to account for the *origin* of whatever it was that

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<sup>35</sup> Freud does not explicitly connect the impulse to count with an attempt to control time. However, there is a clear connection to be made between an early account he gives of obsessive counting and his later account of the ego's defensive measure of temporal 'isolation', which I discuss in the next chapter. In his paper, 'Obsessions and Phobias', Freud presents a woman anxiously counting the boards in a floor and the steps in a staircase as an example of something he calls "*Obsessional arithmomania*". Freud's interpretation is that: "She had begun the counting in order to distract her mind from obsessional ideas (of temptation). She had succeeded in doing so, but the impulse to count had replaced the original obsession" (Freud, 1894b, pp. 77 – 78). The tendency to count compulsively is explained by Barthelemy as a manifestation of our phantasy that time can be regulated. He suggests that the 'count to 10 before speaking' rule is evidence of our unconscious understanding that affect

Aristotle was quantifying and for our different ways of counting or failing to count what it is that we call time. Freud's speculations on time include the notion that time originates in the mind of the counter so that what is counted is much more qualitative than quantitative.

I wanted to show in this chapter that Freud framed his findings about the creation and destruction of time in terms of the myths and cosmologies of the Greek philosophers rather than their philosophies of time. Connectedly, the contributions of the Greek philosophers seem to be to Freud's ideas about timelessness not time: Plato's Eros is placed by Freud as a counter to the death drive; Anaximander's *Apeiron* is a possible source of Freud's notion that death is the price we pay for the time of our life, the debt repaid by the timelessness of our extinction; Empedocles' principles of Love and Discord are in principle identical to Eros and the death drive, both of which pull to timelessness; Plato's Eros is placed by Freud as a counter to the death drive; and Plato's *Symposium* is drawn on to support Freud's views on the pull of the death drive to timelessness. In the next chapter, I examine Freud's concept of timelessness more closely. I look, too, at Freud's departure from the ancient Greeks in that part of his theory of time which turns on notions of periodicity and discontinuity.

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dissipates over time, so that counting before speaking when angry can reduce the impact of what is then later said (Bartemeier, 1941, p. 304).

## CHAPTER 4

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### THE RIDDLE OF TIME

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A particular aspect of the ancient Greek influence on Freud, and one picked up by most of his biographers, is Freud's identification with Oedipus as the tragic hero "who divined the famed riddle and was a man most mighty". Freud's youthful desire to divine the world's riddles was, he tells us, "overpowering" (Freud, 1926b, pp. 253) and, when he was 58, Freud told Ferenczi that he had solved one of the most fundamental riddles of all: "I [...] want to reveal to you that, on paths that have been trodden for a long time, I have finally found the solution to the riddle of time and space" (Freud, 1914e, pp. 29 – 30). As I said in the Introduction, Freud never tells us explicitly what his solution is; and, in one of his last published letters to Princess Bonaparte, Freud lets her know that "so far as time is concerned I hadn't fully informed you of my ideas. Nor anyone else" (Freud, 1938e, p. 455). The previous chapters have worked closely with the ancient Greek canon to see whether its undoubted influence on Freud might throw light on Freud's view of both the riddle of time and its solution. By bringing the Greek canon into dialogue with psychoanalysis, I have been able to elaborate Freud's thoughts on the indestructible nature of the unconscious, the connections between reality, reality-testing and time, the role of delay, loss, lack, refinding and the self-monitoring process in time; and time and the drives. The current chapter now grounds these temporal themes in a more technically detailed focus on three distinct areas: time; timelessness; and the temporality of the drives. Reference to the ancient Greeks in this chapter is much less pronounced: not only to avoid repetition but also because a significant part of this chapter examines Freud's notions of periodicity and discontinuity, notions which are critical to his theory of how we develop an idea of time and on which the influence of the ancient Greeks appears to have little specific impact.



There are three sections to this chapter. Broadly, the first is on time and how Freud suggests that we develop a notion of it; the second is on timelessness, and what Freud really meant by that term; the third section examines the temporal currents which flow between the unconscious and conscious domains, making and breaking chronological connections, their movements driven by the interplay of Eros, the death drive and the influence of the external world.

In the first section, I look at Freud's account of our adaptation to the external world. The adaptation enables a move away from pleasure principle functioning, where we hallucinate what we desire, to secondary process functioning which inserts a delay in the system so that reality testing can take place. Reality testing allows us to distinguish between a perception and an idea. It is a process dependent on the system *Pcpt.-Cs*, whose discontinuous mode of operation Freud places at the centre of the development of our idea of time. The first section concludes with a discussion of Freud's notion that time itself is nothing more - or less - than the projection into the external world of our perception of this discontinuity.

In the second section, I examine what Freud really means by 'timelessness'. Freud's use of the term 'timeless' is made in riddle-type language, with an insistence on a negative sense so that the timeless processes of the unconscious must be understood in terms of what conscious processes are not (Freud, 1920, p. 28; and Freud, 1933, p. 73). All mental events other than external perception begins at the level of the timeless unconscious and only from there can move to the system of consciousness, if at all, " just as a photographic picture begins as a negative and only becomes a picture after being turned into a positive" (Freud, 1917c, p. 294). The second section examines the four 'negative' characteristics of the timeless unconscious identified by Freud: its lack of temporal order; its failure to acknowledge the passage of time; its indestructibility, which Freud contrasts with the transitory quality of perception and consciousness; and its spatiality, which Freud contrasts with the lack of space in consciousness. In this last context, I examine the rarely cited minutes of a 1911 meeting of the Vienna Psycho-Analytical Society where 'The supposed timelessness of the unconscious' was the topic of discussion and where Freud laid great emphasis on the place of spatiality in the temporal discussion. This section has as its natural

conclusion an examination of Freud's development of Kant's theories of time and space.

Finally, I turn to Eros, the death drive and their governing principles to examine their respective roles in the temporal process. Eros, represented by the pleasure principle, pulls us to a state of pleasurable timelessness. The death drive, represented by the Nirvana principle, opposes Eros but pulls, too, to a state of timelessness, beyond pleasure, the undiluted Nirvana principle seeking to “conduct the restlessness of life into the stability of the inorganic state” (Freud, 1924b, p. 159). I show that it is only through the operation of the reality principle, which represents the external world, that the necessary rhythm is established between the two opposing drives for time to emerge. The reality principle’s mediation of the interplay of Eros and the death drive, provides the tempo which allows us to order the events we remember, experience and anticipate into the categories of past, present and future through which we structure our lives; categories whose boundaries disappear in the timeless domain of the unconscious.

### *Part 1: The Emergence of Time*

It is Freud's view that we begin our psychic life in a state of timelessness: in ‘Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning’, he states that unconscious processes were initially our only mental activities (Freud, 1911b, p. 219); in ‘On Narcissism: an Introduction’, he confirms that: “a unity comparable to the ego cannot exist in the individual from the start; the ego has to be developed” (Freud, 1914c, p. 77); and, in *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis* (Freud, 1938a), Freud reconfirms that: “Originally, to be sure, everything was id; the ego was developed out of the id by the continual influence of the external world” (Freud, 1938a, p. 163).

Freud suggests that birth constitutes the first disturbance, the first state of anxiety and the first upset of the psychic equilibrium enjoyed in the womb (Freud, 1900, p. 400; Freud, 1923a, p. 58). The timeless state in the womb, which Freud took to be a warm, dark, stimulus-free environment which preserves our psychic equilibrium (Freud, 1916b, p. 88), seems to be for Freud a pleasurable one where nothing happens. This can be contrasted with the state of a new-born baby, where everything seems to be happening at once, an experience captured by William James’ description: “The baby,

assailed by eyes, ears, nose, skin and entrails all at once, feels it all as one great blooming, buzzing confusion” (James, 1890, p. 488). Freud suggests that our capacity for hatred is a consequence of this experience: “Hate, as a relation to objects, is older than love. It derives from the narcissistic ego’s primordial repudiation of the external world with its outpouring stimuli” (Freud, 1915a, p. 139). The suggestion that this experience might be unpleasurable because of the lack of temporal organisation is consistent with the claim popularly ascribed to Einstein that, if we did not have time, everything would happen at once.

The newborn baby's bombardment with stimulation from internal and external sources means that a timeless state based on maintaining psychic equilibrium fails to hold. What happens next can be given context by looking at the situation of a hungry baby. Hunger is one of the three somatic ‘excitations’ and ‘endogenous stimuli’ which Freud talked about in the ‘Project’ (the other two being sexuality and respiration) (Freud, 1950, p. 296). Hunger gets swept up into the self-preservative drives. I discuss the drives further in section 3: here I want to note Freud’s claim that drives represent the demands made of the mind by the body, their aim to achieve satisfaction through removal of the somatic stimulation made by those demands (Freud, 1905b p. 168; Freud, 1915a, p. 123; Freud, 1938a, p. 148). Satisfaction of the drive produces pleasure. Freud’s 1911 ‘Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning’ demonstrates that initially the baby's psychic life is governed solely by what will eventually become known as the “the pleasure-unpleasure [*Lust-Unlust*] principle, or more shortly the pleasure principle” (Freud, 1911b, p. 219). The pleasure principle’s role appears to be twofold: to reduce to zero or to avoid excitation or unpleasurable tension, the most demanding of which comes from the drives; and, which is not the same thing, to keep the level of excitation, constant (for example: Freud, 1915a, p. 118 et seq; and Freud, 1920, p. 9)<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> It was from his early observations of hysterical and obsessive states that Freud developed his principle of neuronal inertia in the ‘Project’ (Freud, 1950, p. 297) which becomes the pleasure principle and, beyond that, the death drive. Fechner introduced the principle of the conservation of energy into psychology in 1873, deriving an equivalent of Freud's pleasure/unpleasure principle from it. Helmholtz, whose lectures Freud attended, wrote a treatise in 1847 on the principle of the conservation of energy, and Brücke applied the principle in 1874 to all living organisms. Freud openly acknowledged Fechner's influence in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, where he states that Fechner's 1873 derivation of the pleasure principle from the principle of constancy anticipated Freud's own theory on the subject (Freud, 1920, pp. 8-9).

As I discussed in Chapter One, when looking at the myth of Gaia and Uranus, the hunger drive is satisfied through feeding and so the baby learns to make an association between the hunger drive and the object of satisfaction. Each time the baby is hungry, the mnemonic image of the object which provided previous satisfaction of the impulse will be triggered and the baby will seek a repetition of the perception connected to the satisfaction of the need (Freud, 1900, p. 566; Freud, 1915a, p. 122). The pleasure principle brooks no delay and takes the shortest path to wish fulfilment: from the hunger pangs to cathexis of the perception of the satisfying object through hallucination (Freud, 1950, part 1; Freud, 1900, p. 565 et seq; and Freud, 1911b, p. 219). The wished-for object appears as an idea. But it is not really there and so, like a mirage of an oasis in the desert, is always bound to disappoint. As "the excitation arising from an internal need is not due to a force producing a momentary impact but to one which is in continuous operation" (Freud, 1900, p. 566; (and see similarly Freud, 1911b, pp. 220 - 221), the hungry baby hallucinating a feed is likely to have the sense of an unpleasurable experience continuing without end during the period he or she has to wait before real nourishment. The Tantalus myth provides a powerful representation of the disappointment of a hungry baby endlessly hallucinating a feed, Tantalus' torment capturing the sense of eternal longing for the period that wishes remain unsatisfied. Tantalus' crimes are to do with forbidden food: he steals ambrosia and nectar from the gods; and he attempts to feed them 'bad' food, in the form of his casserole son, Pelops, purportedly to test the gods' omniscience to see whether they would partake in a feast prepared from Pelops' stewed flesh. The gods realise what Tantalus has done and disgustingly refuse to eat (all except Demeter who, mourning the abduction of her daughter, Persephone, by her brother, Hades, absentmindedly tucks in and eats Pelops' shoulder). Fortunately, the gods are able to collect up Pelops' body parts and, after they have been boiled up in a sacred cauldron, Pelops is restored to life (with the shoulder inadvertently eaten by Demeter replaced by one fashioned from ivory). By way of punishment, the gods condemn Tantalus to spend eternity in Hades, 'tantalised' by food and drink held just out of his reach. Odysseus describes Tantalus' never-ending torment:

The old man was standing in a pool of water which nearly reached his chin, and his thirst drove him to unceasing efforts; but he could never reach water to drink it. For whenever he stooped in his eagerness to drink, it disappeared. The pool was swallowed up, and all there was at his feet was the dark earth,

which some mysterious power had drained dry. Trees spread their foliage high over the pool and dangled fruits above his head – pear trees and pomegranates, apple-trees with their glossy burden, sweet figs and luxuriant olives. But, whenever the old man made to grasp them in his hands, the wind would toss them upwards towards the shadowy clouds (Homer, *Odyssey*, Book 11, 582 – 592).

Dreamwork and, by extension, the work of myth, often turns an object into its opposite (Freud, 1932a, pp 187 – 188). If we change the old man into his opposite, a baby, and accept Freud's view that fruit symbolises breasts (Freud, 1916b, p 158), then this myth provides a wonderful representation of a hungry and thirsty baby hallucinating his mother's breasts but failing to achieve any relief from the ultimately disappointing hallucination: "whenever the [baby] made to grasp [the dangling fruit] in his hands, the wind would toss them upwards towards the shadowy clouds".

Psychic governance by the pleasure principle fails to bring satisfaction. It is the baby's experience of failure to distinguish between the idea of a wished-for helpful object and the perception of the real thing which leads to the abandonment of hallucination and initiates a developmental change in psychic function, one whereby an appreciation of what is real takes precedence over what is pleasurable. The psychic apparatus has to reach out into the external world to acknowledge what is there - or not there – rather than hallucinate the presence of something absent. The move from the psychic presentation of agreeable ideas only, to psychic presentation of what is judged to be real, even if disagreeable, introduces a new principle of mental governance: the reality principle, the operation of which takes into account the real world and the possibility of one's actions having an impact on it. In 'Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning', Freud describes this step as "momentous" (Freud, 1911b p. 219). Pleasure is renounced, although only temporarily: "A momentary pleasure, uncertain in its results, is given up, but only in order to gain along the new path an assured pleasure at a later time [...] Actually the substitution of the reality principle for the pleasure principle implies no deposing of the pleasure principle, but only a safeguarding of it" (ibid, p. 223). So, although reality may at this point in Freud's theory constitute the other side of hallucination, it does not follow that the reality principle should be contrasted with the pleasure principle: the reality principle is only an extension of the pleasure principle which imposes *delay*, not only in the deferral of pleasure but also to provide the time it takes to test reality to ensure

the satisfaction of the wishes which hallucination fails to achieve. I discussed this in Chapter One in the context of the Greek myth of origins providing a half way house: neither reality nor hallucination.

Realising that immediate hallucination does not give rise to satisfaction, the developing ego learns to inhibit cathexis of the memory of the wished-for object so that, when the real thing appears, its cathexis will be more intense, providing an indication of reality. In the 'Project', Freud insists: "[I]f an ego exists, it must *inhibit*" (Freud, 1950, p. 324, his emphasis). This inhibition lies behind reality testing: "It is accordingly *inhibition by the ego which makes possible a criterion for distinguishing between perception and memory*" (Freud, 1950, p. 326, his emphasis). The question is now not whether something is *pleasurable* or not; but whether it is *real* or not. But, before we can check whether stimuli are real, we first have to defend ourselves against them.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud goes so far as to claim that: "*Protection against stimuli is an almost more important function for the living organism than reception of stimuli*" (Freud, 1920, p. 28, his emphasis). Our initial repudiation of the external world takes the form of the implementation of a protective filtration process, one which Freud will explicitly link to time. The idea of protection through filtration is in evidence as early as the 'Project', where exogenous 'quantity' is dampened down by a filtering system at work in the so-called 'Q-screens', the nerve-ending apparatuses in which the neurones responsible for perception terminate. It was from his observations of hysterical symptoms that Freud was able to develop his notion of 'quantity' [*Quantität*], something akin to both an energy source and a charge. Freud had observed quantity in 'sexual affect' and in the 'excessively intense ideas' present in, for example, hysteria (Freud, 1950, pp. 295 - 296 and p. 348). Freud concluded his 1894 paper, 'The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence', with a helpful analogy: that quantity might be seen as a charge which electrifies memories: "I refer to the concept that in mental functions something is to be distinguished—a quota of affect or sum of excitation—which possesses all the characteristics of a quantity (though we have no means of measuring it), which is capable of increase, diminution, displacement and discharge, and which is spread over the memory-traces of ideas somewhat as an electric charge is spread over the surface of a body" (Freud, 1894a, p. 60).

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the Q-screens are replaced by the more well-known "protective shield against stimuli (*Reizschutz* or "protection against excitation" (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988, p. 357)). Freud asks us to imagine:

a living vesicle with its receptive cortical layer. This little fragment of living substance is suspended in the middle of an external world charged with the most powerful energies; and it would be killed by the stimulation emanating from these if it were not provided with a protective shield against stimuli (Freud, 1920, p. 27).

I think it is important to bear in mind that Freud's use of the solitary vesicle with its shield is another of his analogies, and one used specifically to assist in our understanding of sensory reception. In other words, the vesicle should not necessarily be taken to be Freud's metaphor for the solitary state of the baby. I want to keep this point in mind as it forms part of my counter to Laplanche's claim that Freud fails to acknowledge the essential part of the Other in our development (Laplanche, 1976; Laplanche, 1992; and Laplanche, 1999a). I discuss this in a few pages time, in the context of time, loss and refinding.

Freud's vesicle is susceptible to stimulation<sup>37</sup>. Ceaseless bombardment from stimuli from the external world "bakes" the outermost layer of the vesicle and it dies, saving the deeper layers from a similar end. The baked layer becomes an inorganic semi-permeable membrane, the metaphorical shield permitting only stimuli with much reduced energy to pass through to the underlying layers of the psychic apparatus. The shield operates as a defence against external stimuli only, giving rise to our tendency to treat internal excitations which generate unpleasure as though they were acting from the outside, so that we can then bring in the shield as a defence. This tendency is the origin of projection (Freud, 1920, p. 29). The shield does not prevent modification of underlying layers. Indeed, it is Freud's view that the ego develops out of the id as a consequence of this influence of the external world through the perceptual system, the system *Pcpt.-Cs.* (Freud, 1923, p. 25).

The shield in place, reality testing can take place. Reality-testing entails three important components: (1) an attentive sweep of incoming sense impressions; (2) a memory bank against which those incoming data can be matched; and (3) if we are to

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<sup>37</sup> Freud makes a similar point in the 'Project': "We can link the nervous system, as inheritor of the general irritability of protoplasm, with the irritable external surface [of an organism], which is interrupted by considerable stretches of non-irritable surface" (Freud, 1950, p. 296).

avoid hallucination, an acceptance of loss, that the object we are looking for is not here now.

In 'Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning', Freud makes it clear that the attentive function is an active one ("Its activity meets the sense-impressions half way, instead of awaiting their appearance") and one whose searches take place periodically (Freud, 1911b, p. 220). The idea of periodic searching is important: the connection of periodicity to time was made by Freud as early as the 'Project', where he suggests that the filtration process of the sense-organs only permits passage to stimuli having attached to them this specifically temporal characteristic of periodicity. The neurones connected to consciousness take up this period and this constitutes the fundamental basis of consciousness (Freud, 1950, p. 310). Freud refers again to periodicity in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud, 1920, pp. 7 – 8; p 63) and 'The Economic Problem of Masochism' (Freud, 1924b, p. 160), each time connecting periodicity to our ability to monitor the ups and downs of the pleasure/unpleasure system<sup>38</sup>. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud compares the periodic nature of the search with feelers "which are all the time making tentative advances towards the external world and then drawing back from it" (Freud, 1920, p. 28) and he goes on to hint at a temporal link between the nature of the sampling and our perception of that mode of intermittent operation:

[O]ur abstract idea of time seems to be wholly derived from the method of working of the system *Pcpt.-Cs.* and to correspond to a perception on its own part of that method of working. This mode of functioning may perhaps constitute another way of providing a shield against stimuli. I know that these remarks must sound very obscure, but I must limit myself to these hints (Freud, 1920, p. 28).

The hints can be traced back to *The Interpretation of Dreams* where Freud suggests a layered structure to the psychic apparatus. "We shall suppose that a system in the very front of the apparatus receives the perceptual stimuli but retains no trace of them and thus has no memory, while behind it there lies a second system which transforms the

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<sup>38</sup> Periodicity is also taken by Klein to be important in the development of our notion of time. In her case study of Fritz, she proposes that the concept of time is rooted in periodicity (Klein, 1926): "In Fritz I found also a very close connection between his lack of orientation in space and in time. Corresponding to his repressed interest in the place of his intra-uterine existence was the interest he showed in details as to the time when he was there. Thus both the questions 'Where was I before birth?' and 'When was I there?' were repressed. The unconscious equation of sleep, death and intra-uterine existence was evident in many of his sayings and phantasies, and connected with this was his curiosity as to the duration of these states and their succession in time. It would appear that the change from intra-uterine to extra-uterine existence, as the prototype of all periodicity, is one of the roots of the concept of time and of orientation in time" (Klein, 1926, p. 56).



momentary excitations of the first system into permanent traces" (Freud, 1900, p. 537). It is the perceptual system which cannot be modified and so therefore cannot retain memories, which provides consciousness with its indications of reality. Behind consciousness lies the system *Pcs.*, the preconscious which screens off the final underlying layer of the apparatus: unconscious. A footnote added in 1919 makes the connection between perception and consciousness more explicit: "the system next beyond the *Pcs.* is the one to which consciousness must be ascribed—in other words, that *Pcpt. = Cs.*" (Freud, 1900, p. 541, footnote). The hints are taken up in 'A Note Upon the Mystic Writing-Pad' where the writing pad provides Freud with a metaphor for the functions of perception, consciousness and memory. The pad's transparent celluloid and waxed paper surface layers provide "an ever-ready receptive surface" (Freud, 1925b, p. 228), which represents the perceptual system to which both consciousness and time are to be connected, one which forms no permanent traces; and the pad's underlying wax slab, which provides a permanent record of the written notes, represents memory. The writing on the mystic pad vanishes when the paper is peeled away from the wax slab, the contact broken and the surface cleaned to receive new impressions. The breaking of the contact represents the discontinuity of the perceptual system's engagement with the external world:

cathectic innervations are sent out and withdrawn in rapid periodic impulses from within into the completely pervious system *Pcpt.-Cs.* So long as that system is cathected in this manner, it receives perceptions (which are accompanied by consciousness) and passes the excitation on to the unconscious mnemonic systems; but as soon as the cathexis is withdrawn, consciousness is extinguished and the functioning of the system comes to a standstill. It is as though the unconscious stretches out feelers, through the medium of the system *Pcpt.-Cs.*, towards the external world and hastily withdraws them as soon as they have sampled the excitations coming from it (Freud, 1925b, p. 231).

Freud goes on to refer to a theory about time which he says he has long held but he has so far kept to himself: that this "discontinuous method of functioning of the system *Pcpt.-Cs.* lies at the bottom of the origin of the concept of time" (Freud, 1925b, p. 231). The importance to Freud's theory of time of this discontinuity will become more clear a little later when I examine his correspondence with Princess Bonaparte.

In another 1925 paper, 'On Negation' (Freud, 1925d), Freud makes a similar point, this time attaching the feelers to the ego rather than to the unconscious. The reference

to feelers in ‘On Negation’ is made in the context of Freud’s discussion of judgment, that is, the “intellectual action which decides the choice of motor action, which puts an end to the postponement due to thought and which leads over from thinking to acting” (Freud, 1925d, p. 238). Freud describes the duration of the period of postponement of action as one during which the ego palpates, a technique it learnt earlier in its active and intermittent exploration of the world. “The ego periodically sends out small amounts of cathexis into the perceptual system, by means of which it samples the external stimuli, and then after every such tentative advance it draws back again” (ibid). This notion of a deferral of action whilst the ego ‘palpates’, not only carries with it the idea of delay, which is what distinguishes the reality principle from the pleasure principle, but also suggests an important connection with *Nachträglichkeit*, or “deferred action” as the English translation renders it, the theory that an experience is given retrospective meaning after a later experience. The English translation as “deferred action” is sometimes criticised but it does carry with it the sense of deferral and delay which is so much part of Freud’s theory of time. The notion of *Nachträglichkeit* can be seen in and from Freud’s 1895 ‘Project’, and in his case study of Emma of the same year. Freud is clear that “no sexual experiences produce any effect so long as the subject is ignorant of all sexual feeling-in general, that is, till the beginning of puberty” (Freud, 1950, p. 333). *Nachträglichkeit* is perhaps best illustrated by Freud’s case study of the ‘Wolf Man’ (Freud, 1918b), whose early observation of the primal scene was given retrospective traumatic effect by later experience<sup>39</sup>.

In Chapter Two, I suggested that the Chorus’ description of the retrospective redefinition of Oedipus’ marriage to Jocasta, the impact of present knowledge on past events contains the seeds of Freud’s later theory of *Nachträglichkeit*:

Time, all-seeing Time has dragged you to the light,

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<sup>39</sup> Birksted-Breen’s paper, ‘Time and the *après-coup*’ (Birksted-Breen, 2003), provides a helpful summary of the development of Freud’s concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, which came to prominence, she suggests, in line with the French approach because of Lacan’s specific focus on it. Birksted-Breen touches on Strachey’s various translations of Freud’s terms *nachträglich* and *Nachträglichkeit*, and refers to the important commentary provided by Laplanche and Pontalis (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1967; and Laplanche, 1998). Birksted-Breen looks at the use in British psychoanalysis of the notion of *après-coup*, which she finds implicit in the ‘here and now’ model of interpretation. Eickhoff’s paper, ‘On *Nachträglichkeit*: The Modernity of an Old Concept’, provides another useful summary and analysis of the concept, the importance of which he convincingly argues has been somewhat overlooked (Eickhoff, 2006).

judged your marriage monstrous from the start –  
the son and the father tangling, both one (*Oedipus Rex*, 1340-1342).

*Nachträglichkeit* requires the second component of the reality testing process, described by Freud in 'Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning' as a system of notation, whose task is "to lay down the results of this periodical activity of consciousness—a part of what we call *memory* (Freud, 1911b pp. 220- 221). Freud claims very early on, in the 'Project', that: "A psychological theory deserving any consideration must furnish an explanation of 'memory'" (Freud, 1950, p. 299). Laplanche and Pontalis suggest that Freud does not provide a full account of his theory of memory (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988, p. 247). What Freud does do, in the 'Project' and in later works, is provide an account of the inherent incompatibility between the idea of memory, which necessarily involves duration, and perception, which, because it is always open to fresh impressions, does not.

Storing our own bodily experiences and motor images in memory means that there is something against which later perceptions can be compared. Without notation, the reality testing process could not be undertaken: there would be nothing against which to match the incoming stimuli. Freud thus seems to model both reality testing and *Nachträglichkeit* on the same process: one where a perception will, if matched, then, and only then, provide an existing memory with temporal significance. If I am right, then it follows that Freud did not confuse the two aspects of temporality as claimed by Laplanche in a 1994 interview where he says: "I think that there are at least two aspects of time in Freud, and I think he mixed them together. On the one hand, there is the question of time as the experience of the outside world, which is linked to perception and to what he calls the system of consciousness. But this, in my opinion, is the biological aspect of time. And that aspect of time is very limited; it is immediate time, immediate temporality. But what Freud tried to discover, through *Nachträglichkeit*, is something much more connected with the whole of a life. That is another type of temporality. It is the temporality of retranslating one's own fate, of retranslating what's coming to this fate from the message of the other. That's a completely different aspect of temporality" (Laplanche, 1994). My view is that the retranslation is not a different aspect of temporality: both perception and *Nachträglichkeit* depend on a match being made for an existing memory to be given temporal significance. The difference is only in terms of the time taken for the match

to be made: perception can be almost simultaneous; *Nachträglichkeit* can take many years.

The third component of reality testing is one of loss, something at which I looked closely in Chapter One. To test reality, we must acknowledge that the object is really lost, even temporarily, rather than hallucinate its presence; we need to distinguish between our cathected memory of the desired object and our perception which currently lacks the object. The reality testing process is thus a search to refind something lost, to attend to the stimuli from the outside world to see if, within them, a match can be made with the memory of the lost object. I have already emphasised that the example Freud provides of the lost object in the ‘Project’ is the mother’s breast (Freud, 1950, p. 328). And, in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, he says: “There are thus good reasons why a child sucking at his mother's breast has become the prototype of every relation of love. The finding of an object is in fact a refinding of it” (Freud, 1905b, p. 222). In ‘On Negation’, Freud makes loss a precondition for reality-testing:

[The first and immediate aim [...] of reality-testing is not to *find* an object in real perception which corresponds to the one presented, but to *refind* such an object, to convince oneself that it is still there. [...] [I]t is evident that a precondition for the setting up of reality-testing is that objects shall have been lost which once brought real satisfaction (Freud, 1925d, pp. 237 – 238).

Under governance of the developing reality principle, the hungry baby must acknowledge the mother's absence and connect the hunger to that reality, permitting an idea of the future being different from the present in the anticipation of satisfaction on the mother’s return. Freud seems to propose a developmental progression from a state of being, to one of having, to one of loss. Initially the baby identifies totally with the mother’s breast: the baby *is* the breast, rather than *has* the breast, as Freud confirms in his posthumously published jottings of 12th July, 1938:

‘Having’ and ‘being’ in children. Children like expressing an object-relation by an identification: ‘I am the object.’ ‘Having’ is the later of the two; after loss of the object it relapses into ‘being’. Example: the breast. ‘The breast is a part of me, I am the breast’. Only later: ‘I have it’—that is, ‘I am not it’ (Freud, 1938c, p. 300)<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (Freud, 1921a), Freud looks at the difference between being and having in the context of other being the father, through identification, and having

I referred a little earlier to Laplanche's critique of Freud that he fails to acknowledge the essential part of the Other in our development of both consciousness and time (Laplanche, 1976; Laplanche, 1992; and Laplanche, 1999a). I think a revision of Laplanche's critique is necessary to take account of the fact that the other *is* very much in evidence in Freud's views on temporality: the example Freud provides of the first lost object is the mother's breast (Freud, 1950, p. 328); and it is Freud's view that all of our subsequent loving relationships are an attempt to refind this earliest of attachments (Freud, 1905b, p. 222). Refinding is part of the reality-testing process which is part of the activity from which our abstract notion of time follows. And the superego, which, as I discussed in Chapter Two, develops hand in hand with the time factor, represents the internalised figures of authority with whom we have formed the strongest of attachments. I think that, contrary to Laplanche's view, Freud's theory of time *relies* on the loss, refinding and internalising of our attachments to others.

Freud claims in his paper, 'Creative Writers and Daydreaming', that children's play links imagined objects and situations to objects the child can see and touch in the real world confirming that: "[T]he opposite of play is not what is serious but what is real" (Freud, 1908a, p. 144). It is play which helps us make the developmental step required to distinguish between temporary absence and permanent loss. The little boy Freud famously observes playing the Fort Da game (the boy throwing away a cotton reel so that it is gone! [Fort!] and then reeling it back into sight so it is there again [Da!]) is, Freud tells us, playing with "disappearance and return" (Freud, 1920, p. 15): the boy is learning to master his feelings to do with his mother's temporary absence by repeatedly effecting the disappearance and reappearance of the reel. The child throwing the reel out of sight imposes a spatial and temporal absence in the real world; the cotton reel is gone now. Reeling it back into sight again replaces absence with presence. Laplanche rightly acknowledges that: "The absence of the object, whilst inaugurating space, is also connected with the beginnings of time. The simplest narrative contains the story of an object that left and then came back" (Laplanche, 1999, p. 241).

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the father, by taking him as an object choice. He refers to his earlier case study of Dora ('Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria' (Freud, 1905a)) where Freud takes Dora's imitation of her father's cough as confirmation of her identification with him: "we can only describe the state of things by saying *that identification has appeared instead of object-choice, and that object-choice has regressed to identification*" (Freud, 1921a, p. 106, his emphasis).

Early on, *all* absences are experienced as loss. Further development is required to enable us to distinguish between temporary and permanent loss. In *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (Freud, 1926a), Freud considers an infant's reaction to the disappearance of her mother. "Certain things seem to be joined together in it which will later on be separated out. It cannot as yet distinguish between temporary absence and permanent loss. As soon as it loses sight of its mother it behaves as if it were never going to see her again; and repeated consoling experiences to the contrary are necessary before it learns that her disappearance is usually followed by her re-appearance. [.....] Thus, the first determinant of anxiety, which the ego itself introduces, is loss of perception of the object (which is equated with loss of the object itself)" (Freud, 1926a, pp. 169 – 170). As we become older, we learn to cope with temporary absence. Permanent loss remains difficult. The following is an extract from a poignant letter that Freud wrote to Binswanger on 12<sup>th</sup> April 1929, after learning of the death of Binswanger's son, Robert, aged only 20. Freud recalls the death of his own daughter, Sophie, who would have been 36 on the day that he wrote the letter:

We know that the acute sorrow we feel after such a loss will run its course, but also that we will remain inconsolable, and will never find a substitute. No matter what may come to take its place, even should it fill that place completely, it yet remains something else. And that is how it should be. It is the only way of perpetuating a love that we do not want to abandon (Freud, 1929, p. 196).

Perelberg opens her *Time, Space and Phantasy* with this sentence: "It is in the space created by the absence of the object that a sense of time is instituted and the activity of phantasy takes place" (Perelberg, 2008, p. 1). Perelberg is right to claim that loss is an important component of the reality testing process from which time follows; but perhaps ought not to have put both phantasy and time into the space which she assumes is created by loss. For phantasy is an activity of the unconscious, to which, as I shortly discuss, Freud attributes spatiality; whereas time, for Freud, is initiated through our perception of the workings of consciousness, which lacks spatiality.

Where a sufficient level of loss can be tolerated, then all is set for the reality testing process: the ego can inhibit the hallucination of the mnemic image which coincides with the wished-for object, inserting a delay during which a periodic sweep of incoming stimuli can be made to see if a match can be established with what is

already cathected in memory. The importance Freud gives to the *discontinuous* nature of the periodic sweep, expressed mechanically as palpation and metaphorically in the exploratory forays of feelers, is made particularly clear in his correspondence with Princess Bonaparte on the draft of her paper, 'Time and the Unconscious' (Bonaparte, 1940). On 22nd August, 1938, Freud wrote:

Meine liebe Marie: I have just read the manuscript of your paper on 'Time' and am having it copied. From the part on the Unconscious onward it gets better, more important and full of content. We have already talked about our agreement over the final conclusions. The work does you honour (Freud, 1938d).

I have already emphasised the point that, later in the same year, on 12<sup>th</sup> November, he wrote again: "Your comments on "time and space" have come off better than mine would have - although so far as time is concerned I hadn't fully informed you of my ideas" (Freud, 1938e, p. 455). Freud's second letter is courteous; but it is clear that he is qualifying to some extent the value which Bonaparte's paper might provide as an assumed record of his thoughts on time.

Freud suggests in his letter of 22nd August that Bonaparte's paper would be improved if it were extended to include analysis of the role of the perceptual process in our formation of an idea of time. He writes:

My first impression is that a second section might follow, taking up the theme with analytic methods. I will make a modest suggestion in this direction. There is an area whose frontiers belong both to the outer world and to the ego: our perceptual superficies. So it might be that the idea of time is connected with the work of the system W.-Bw. (Freud, 1938d).

The system W.-Bw is the system Pcpt.-Cs or perceptual consciousness. Freud had made the connection between the perceptual system and time before, in *The Ego and the Id* where he claims that the ego "[b]y virtue of its relation to the perceptual system [...] gives mental processes an order in time and submits them to 'reality-testing'" (Freud, 1923a, p. 55).

The only record of Freud's letter of 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1938 which is publically available is that cited by Jones in the third volume of his biography on Freud, *Sigmund Freud: Life And Work* (Jones, 1957). Unfortunately, Jones cites only part of Freud's letter (and Dr Bruno of the Library of Congress, in a personal communication of 13<sup>th</sup>

January, 2012, for which I am grateful, confirms that Jones misdates the letter as being 21<sup>st</sup> August not 22<sup>nd</sup>). The Freud Museum does not have a copy of this letter in its archives and the original letter is held in the Library of Congress in Washington, inaccessible until 2020, the open date the donor placed on much of the Marie Bonaparte material in the Library's possession. As a footnote to the edited extract from the letter, Jones adds: "A little later Freud tried to picture the development of the sense of time in terms of Planck's quantum theory" (Jones, 1957, p. 466). Max Planck's quantum theory, published at the beginning of the twentieth century, claims that the radiation of energy from a heated body is emitted in discontinuous bursts, in parcels of energy, or "quanta"<sup>41</sup>. The whole of Freud's letter to Bonaparte is thus highly relevant. In the disappointing absence of sight of the letter until 2020, I revisited the published version of Bonaparte's paper, 'Time and the Unconscious', where Bonaparte refers in a footnote to a communication from Freud. I think this reference may well be to the letter of 22<sup>nd</sup> August to which access is currently denied. The footnote reads:

After reading this paper Freud communicated to me another idea which had occurred to him, based on a psychology of attention. According to this, the attention which we bestow on objects is due to rapid but successive cathexes which might be regarded in a sense as quanta issuing from the ego. Our inner perceptual activity would only later make a continuity of it, and it is here that we find, projected into the outside world, the prototype of time. During sleep, these cathexes would be withdrawn, which would explain why time is abolished while one sleeps. It is only reactivated in the course of sleep in association with the hallucinatory perceptions of the dream, attention needless to say remaining closely bound up with perception. We might add that man afterwards re-establishes these primitive quanta of cathexis in time when he divides up measurable time. The upshot of all this would be the equation 'attention = perception – time' (Bonaparte, 1940, p. 467).

There are several important points in this dense paragraph. The first is Freud's reference to quanta, which carries with it the idea of discontinuity. Peter Hartocollis,

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<sup>41</sup> I found Shahn Majid's chapter on 'Quantum Spacetime and Psychical Reality' particularly helpful in putting into context Planck's 1900 quantum theory to which Freud refers in his correspondence with Marie Bonaparte (Majid in Connes et al, 2008, p. 59 et seq). Robert Le Poivedin provides stimulating discussion of some of the paradoxes of time and space, including the connection between Newton's laws of motion and concepts of absolute time and space, Einstein's theories which integrated and relativised space and time, quantum physics and string theory (Le Poivedin, 2003). More recently, Alain Connes and other leading scientists brought together their insights in *On Space and Time* (Connes et al, 2008). Unsurprisingly, these works do not refer to Freud. But each captures the human desire to grapple with time, to measure it, to hold it and to try to understand it.



in his 1974 paper ‘Origins of time: a reconstruction of the ontogenetic development of the sense of time based on object-relations theory’ makes the point that William James, like Freud, used the concept of quanta to make sense of experience, taking experiences to be discontinuous quanta made continuous by the application of intellect. James, in *Principles of Psychology* (James, 1890), suggests that our perception of time depends on our awareness of change. Even if we empty our minds, we cannot get rid of our awareness of the rhythm of our breathing, heartbeats and what James calls our ‘pulses of our attention’ (James, 1890, p. 621) as we attend to fragments of words or sentences that pass through our imagination. It is these rhythms which beat out time’s passage. James’ pulsating attentive state seems very similar to Freud’s pulsating ego which radiates quanta in the attentive process. Hartocollis concludes, however, and I think rightly, that Freud’s source of influence was not specifically James but rather the nineteenth century scientific tradition within which both Freud and James worked - and Planck, Mach and Einstein – where energies and cathexes were being discussed in terms of quanta and relativity<sup>42</sup>.

The second point to extract from Bonaparte’s footnote is that our discontinuous engagement with the world, which I have looked at in terms of Freud's metaphorical feelers, provides chronologically unconnected samples. These samples are then given temporal continuity by our perceptual activity. There is evidence of this thread of Freud's thought in some as yet unpublished jottings Freud made on his desk calendar in 1918:

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<sup>42</sup> Ernst Mach’s principle anticipated Einstein’s theory of relativity, which overturned the paradigmatic notions of Newton that time and space were absolute. Blackmore’s *Ernst Mach: his work, life and influence* suggests that Mach had an indirect influence on Freud through Breuer: Mach and Breuer worked on similar medical matters during the 1870s and knew each other reasonably well (Blackmore, 1972, p. 71). Mach, like Freud, was deeply influenced and interested in the significance of childhood events and dreams and Blackmore suggests that Freud read Mach's *Analyse der Emphsindungen* (Blackmore, 1972, p. 92). The less well known Karl Pearson would be part of the nineteenth century scientific tradition too. Freud had a copy of Pearson’s *The Grammar of Science* in his library and marked up the chapter on space and time where Pearson defines time as a mode of perception and states that “the power of ‘perceiving things apart’ by progression or sequences [is] an essential feature of conscious life, if not of existence” (Pearson, 1911, pp. 208 – 209, cited in Gilman et al, 1994, p. 241).

Begriff bildg macht Diskontin aus Kontinuis sichern, umgekehrt wie Zeit u Raum [concept formation makes discontinuity from continuity, and vice versa to time and space]<sup>43</sup>.

This also makes sense of the equation to which Bonaparte refers at the end of her footnote: *attention = perception – time*. Attention is only the first part of the reality testing process; it is the perceptual process which adds the temporal dimension. The equation *attention = perception – time* can be compared with a similar equation Freud provides in *The Outline* at the time of his correspondence with Bonaparte. Freud, in his discussion there of the reality-testing process, and its function being to distinguish between an hallucinated perception and a perception coming from the external world, says that: "The equation 'perception = reality (external world)' no longer holds. Errors, which can now easily arise and do so regularly in dreams, are called hallucinations" (Freud, 1938a, p. 162). It is clear that, in the equation Freud shared with Bonaparte, 'perception' means the 'perceptual process' whereas, in the *Outline*, 'perception' means an idea. That said, what we can glean from both equations is that time and reality seem here to be one and the same, dependent on the perceptual process.

This takes me to the third point of that part of Bonaparte's footnote which reads: "Our inner perceptual activity would only later make a continuity of [the discontinuous samples] and it is here that we find, projected into the outside world, the prototype of time". Bonaparte elaborates this point in the main body of her paper, referring to a conversation she apparently had with Freud after he had read her manuscript.

Bonaparte writes:

The sense we have of the passing of time, he observed, originates in our inner perception of the passing of our own life. When consciousness awakens within us we perceive this internal flow and then project it into the outside world (Bonaparte, 1940, p. 466).

The first sentence is prone to loss of meaning through Bonaparte's circular means of expression, but it does highlight the importance that Freud gives to the self-monitoring process in our development of a sense of time. The second sentence refers

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<sup>43</sup> Freud's unpublished jottings on his desk calendar on the page for 10<sup>th</sup> April 1918. The original papers are held in the Freud Museum with copyright held by the Sigmund Freud estate. I am grateful to Michael Molnar for bringing the papers to my attention and for the translation.

to a projection of a particular internal perception. There are two elements here: the perception; and its projection.

I showed in Chapter One, in the context of endopsychic myths and their relation to time, that the idea that we are able to perceive certain workings of our mind is present from very early on in Freud's work. In the 'Project', Freud suggests that pleasure and unpleasure derive from our ability to monitor the level of cathexis of the  $\omega$  neurones which give rise to conscious sensations (Freud, 1950, p. 12). Then there is the attentive agency, or censor, introduced in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, which keeps an eye on the nature of the material to be permitted access to preconsciousness (Freud, 1900, pp. 166 – 167)). In Chapter Two, I discussed Freud's connection of the psychical agency which observes the ego (and which will become the superego) with the time-factor (Freud, 1914c, p. 96, footnote). In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud suggests that we monitor the workings of our system Pcpt-Cs, too, and, as I showed a few pages ago, explicitly connects the nature of the sampling and our perception of that mode of intermittent operation process to our idea of abstract time ("Our abstract idea of time seems to be wholly derived from the method of working of the system Pcpt-Cs and to correspond to a perception on its own part of that method of working" (Freud, 1920, p. 28). Finally, much later, in his posthumously published 'Findings, Ideas, Problems', Freud's entry for August 22, 1938, reads: "Mysticism is the obscure self-perception of the realm outside the ego, of the id" (Freud, 1938c, p. 300) suggesting another aspect of the ability to observe ourselves.

It is clear that we can monitor what is going on inside, even if unconsciously. But does Freud think we can monitor "the passing of our own life" as Bonaparte suggests he does? I do not think that Bonaparte has it quite right here. She claims that Freud said: "The sense we have of the passing of time originates in our inner perception of the passing of our own life", a muddlingly circular sentence. I have already highlighted Freud's qualification of Bonaparte's claim that she provides a record of his thoughts on time, contained in his letter of 12<sup>th</sup> November 1938 ("so far as time is concerned I hadn't fully informed you of my ideas" (Freud, 1938e, p. 455)) and I think this is one point where the qualification must apply. I suggest that, instead of Bonaparte's representation, Freud's view remains as it was in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: that we can perceive the workings of our system Pcpt-Cs and it is this

perception, of the system's mode of intermittent functioning, which provides us with our abstract idea of time (Freud, 1920, p. 28).

According to Bonaparte's record of her conversation with Freud, there are two elements which give rise to our idea of time: the perception; and its projection (Bonaparte, 1940, p. 466). Remaining with Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* position, it is the perception of the mode of operation of the process of system *Pcpt-Cs* from which we form a prototype of time. According to Bonaparte, Freud thought we project this perception into the external world and it is from this projection that we obtain our idea of time.

I have already shown the importance Freud gives to the projection of this type of perception in his notion of endopsychic myths which I examined in Chapter One. Freud took myths to derive from "[t]he dim inner perception of one's own psychic apparatus [which] stimulates thought illusions, which of course are projected onto the outside and, characteristically, into the future and the beyond" (Freud, 1897e, p. 286). Freud makes the same point in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, where he puts forwards his belief that mythology and a substantial part of religion "*is nothing but psychology projected into the external world*" (Freud, 1901, pp. 258 – 259, his emphasis). In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud highlights the developmental stage of abstract thought required before our picture of the external world can be translated to reveal the inner perceptions from which it derives (Freud, 1913d, p. 64).

Bonaparte relates Freud's view that all of our perceptions of the external world are projections to some degree: touch and taste remain mostly internal; smell projects its perceptions into the surrounding atmosphere; the projections of hearing are experienced as being both internally and externally sourced; and the perceptions of sight are completely projected into the outside world. This is consistent with Freud's idea of the ego being bodily (so extended) and a projection: "The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface" and the footnote elaborates "i.e. the ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body. It may thus be regarded as a mental projection of the surface of the body, besides, as we have seen above, representing the superficies of the mental apparatus" (Freud, 1926a, p. 26). Bonaparte goes on: "May it not be the same, Freud concluded, with our external

perceptions of space and time, and would not this translation into psycho-analytical language of the old *a priori* judgements of Kant vindicate him approximately?" (Bonaparte 1940, pp. 465 – 466). Freud's suggestion that psychoanalysis had vindicated Kant, as Bonaparte claims, seems consistent with some notes Freud made at the same time. In 'Findings, Ideas, Problems', Freud suggested that:

Space may be the projection of the extension of the psychical apparatus. No other derivation is probable. Instead of Kant's *a priori* determinants of our psychical apparatus. Psyche is extended; knows nothing about it (Freud, 1938c, p. 300).

I discuss Kant's *a priori* determinants of time and space towards the end of the next section. Here, I want to note that Bonaparte disagrees with Freud: "I must confess that even Freud's arguments fail to convince me that our perceptions of space and time are originally and essentially an internal affair. For if the prototypes of these perceptions lie thus deeply buried within ourselves, how has this come to pass? Here I would recall Goethe's dictum that all that is within us exists without, insisting on the sense in which Goethe used it, of internalization of the outside world" (Bonaparte, 1940, p. 467). Bonaparte's argument hangs there, relying on Goethe rather than analysis to bolster her claim that we internalize the external world rather than, as both Freud and Kant would have it, obtaining our understanding of the external world through a projection onto it of temporal and spatial constructs of mind.

Bonaparte suggests that Freud makes the following argument for the origin of our idea of space. Mind is the only thing of which we can conceive which lacks spatial quality. This might be "by reason of a massive projection outwards of all its original spatial attributes. [...] When our consciousness begins to establish itself, it would perceive these internal institutions, the reconstruction of which we owe entirely to depth psychology, as located in space. [...] We should then project this internal act of cognition outwards, so that the space inhering in the outside world would originate in a projection of our own internal space which we should then proceed to deny" (Bonaparte, 1940, p. 466).

Although Bonaparte claims that Freud thought the "perception of space cannot be separated from that of time" (ibid), this does not mean that time and space can be treated as one; more care needs to be taken than Bonaparte does to tease out the two concepts. According to Bonaparte, Freud is proposing that our idea of *space* derives

from the projection of our extended psychic apparatus into the outside world. It is because of this projection that we assume mind lacks spatiality. Which part of Freud's concept of mind lacks spatiality? The answer must be that it is the conscious part: consciousness is transitory ("what is conscious is only conscious for a moment" (Freud, 1938a, p. 40), akin to the "ever-ready receptive surface" of the mystic writing pad (Freud, 1925b, p. 228) on which no permanent trace forms. Indeed, Freud thought consciousness arises *instead* of a memory trace (Freud, 1920, p. 25). The unconscious part of the mind, on the other hand, lacks temporality, but, as I show in the next section, retains a sense of space.

For Freud, our concept of space seems to derive from a projection of the perception of our inner spatiality; but our concept of time derives from the projection of our perception of the intermittent mode of operation of the working of the perceptual system. Perception, therefore, does more than make temporal sense of the stimuli coming in from the external world: the perception of the workings of our mind and the projection of those perceptions is what, for Freud, constitutes the very idea of time itself.

## *Part 2: The Timelessness of the Unconscious*

In the previous section, I looked at how Freud thought we develop a notion of time. This section looks at time's negative: timelessness. It is notable that, since Freud, there seems to have been a move away from describing the unconscious as 'timeless' and towards suggesting that what goes on in the unconscious is subject to a different kind of temporality. Thus, for example, Green speaks of the 'shattered time' in dreams where everything takes place in the present (Green, 2002); Hartocollis opposes 'thought' time to Bergson's idea of 'lived' time (Hartocollis, 1972, p. 93; Hartocollis, 1974, p. 243) and Scarfone locates the unconscious outside chronological time but not outside temporality (Scarfone, 2006, pp. 831 – 832). Freud, however, is clear that he views the unconscious as truly timeless and provides some clear definitions as to what constitutes its timelessness. In 'The Unconscious', Freud writes: "The processes of the system *Ucs.* are *timeless*; i.e., they are not ordered temporally, are not altered by the passage of time; they have no reference to time at all. Reference to time is bound up, once again, with the work of the system *Cs.*" (Freud, 1915c, p. 187). He says very much the same thing in *Beyond the Pleasure*

*Principle*: “We have learnt that unconscious mental processes are in themselves ‘timeless’. This means in the first place that they are not ordered temporally, that time does not change them in any way and that the idea of time cannot be applied to them” (Freud, 1920, p. 28). And, in *The New Introductory Lectures*, Freud writes: “There is nothing in the id that corresponds to the idea of time; there is no recognition of the passage of time, and—a thing that is most remarkable and awaits consideration in philosophical thought—no alteration in its mental processes is produced by the passage of time (Freud, 1933 p. 73).

Freud's notion of timelessness applies to the unconscious systems of his first topography and the id of his second topography. Notably, the unconscious parts of the ego do seem to have some sort of awareness of temporal processes and a capacity to manipulate them. Freud's concepts of ‘isolation’ and ‘undoing what has been done’ [*ungeschehenmachen*] illustrate the point. A defensive measure, isolation is first mentioned in ‘Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis’, Freud’s case study of the Rat Man (Freud, 1909c). Isolation is the ego’s *use* of time to buffer ourselves from the experience of an event; an insertion of a time interval between the unpleasant event and the obsessive behaviour which follows from it to sever the causal connection between the two: “[t]he obsessive thought which has forced its way into consciousness with such excessive violence has next to be secured against the efforts made by conscious thought to resolve it. [...] With this end in view, in the first place *an interval of time is inserted* between the pathogenic situation and the obsession that arises from it, so as to lead astray any conscious investigation of its causal connections, and in the second place the content of the obsession is taken out of its particular setting by being *generalized*” (Freud, 1909c, p. 246, his emphasis). What should be brought together is held apart by time. Freud discusses isolation further in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (Freud, 1926a), together with another temporal trick: “*undoing what has been done*”. Freud describes this as “negative magic” (Freud, 1926a, p. 119), an attempt by the ego through motor symbolism “to ‘blow away’ not merely the *consequences* of some event (or experience or impression) but the event itself” (ibid).

Timelessness, then, is a term which Freud seems to intend only to be applied to unconscious id processes and the unconscious material on which these processes

work, material which includes everything that is subject to repression. Freud graphically describes repression in his notes to Fliess on 'The Architecture of Hysteria', in his answer to the question why we might prevent a memory from becoming conscious: "To put it crudely, the current memory stinks just as an actual object stinks; and just as we turn away our sense organ (the head and nose) in disgust, so do our preconsciousness and our conscious sense turn away from the memory. This is *repression*" (Freud, 1897a, p. 269). In his paper, 'Repression' (Freud, 1915b), Freud reiterates this point more clinically. He tells us that: "*the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious*" (Freud, 1915b, p. 147, Freud's emphasis). In 'Analysis Terminable and Interminable' (Freud, 1937a), Freud is explicit that repression only takes place in early childhood: repression is "a primitive defensive measure adopted by the immature, feeble ego" (Freud, 1937a, p. 383). These repressions persist, used by the ego to master instinct and later conflicts are resolved by 'after-repression'. Thus, although repressions persist, analysis can permit the more mature ego to review them, allowing the lifting of certain repressions and a more solid reconstruction of the dams resisting others.

There is more than the repressed in the unconscious: unconscious material is all that is not conscious. So it includes, too, all of our memories, thoughts and wishes, some of which gain access to preconsciousness and then to consciousness; some of which do not. Adrian Johnston, in his *Time Driven: metapsychology and the splitting of the drive* (Johnston, 2005), suggests that Freud fails to provide a clear account of temporality, asking how he can treat the unconscious as being timeless yet with the ability, as Johnston puts it, to privilege the past. This "implies an automatic recognition by the unconscious of a chronological hierarchy amongst its mnemonic components". Johnston concludes that, therefore: "The unconscious does indeed have some sort of awareness of time" (Johnston, 2005, p. 129). But Johnston's argument fails to acknowledge that *all* mnemonic material is without hierarchy. Some of it is repressed and some is not. That which is repressed is not because the material forms part of an assumed chronological hierarchy but because, instead, of the immaturity of the ego at the time of the experience from which the ego requires defence.



I turn now to the four factors which constitute Freud's defining components of the timelessness of the unconscious: (1) a lack of temporal order; (2) a failure to acknowledge time's passage; (3) inalterability by time; and (4) the inapplicability of the idea of time.

1. *Lack of temporal order*

Freud makes his first allusion to the timeless nature of the unconscious, in the sense of it lacking temporal order, in his draft notes to Fliess on 'The Architecture of Hysteria' of May 25, 1897. He claims that: "[N]eglect of the characteristic of time [is] no doubt essential for the distinction between activity in the preconscious and the unconscious" (Freud, 1897e, p. 247). Then, using an analogy drawn from chemistry, Freud suggests that the chronological connections between the constitutive parts of a memory of a traumatic event are removed in the unconscious, the fragments of the memory being then reassembled in a way which allows the development of a phantasy:

Fantasies are formed by amalgamation and distortion analogous to the decomposition of a chemical body which is compounded with another one. For the first sort of distortion consists in a falsification of memory by fragmentation in which it is precisely the chronological relations that are neglected. (Chronological connections seem specifically to depend on the activity of the system of consciousness) (Freud, 1897e, p. 247).

Thus: "hysterical symptoms are derivatives of memories which are operating unconsciously" (Freud, 1896a, p. 212); and, later: "[O]ur hysterical patients suffer from *reminiscences*. Their symptoms are residues and mnemonic symbols of particular (traumatic) experiences" (Freud, 1910a, p. 16, his emphasis)<sup>44</sup>. Similar chronological

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<sup>44</sup> Freud makes an illuminating comparison of these mnemonic symbols with London's Charing Cross and the Monument: "If you take a walk through the streets of London, you will find, in front of one of the great railway termini, a richly carved Gothic column—Charing Cross. One of the old Plantagenet kings of the thirteenth century ordered the body of his beloved Queen Eleanor to be carried to Westminster; and at every stage at which the coffin rested he erected a Gothic cross. Charing Cross is the last of the monuments that commemorate the funeral cortege. At another point in the same town, not far from London Bridge, you will find a towering, and more modern, column, which is simply known as 'The Monument'. It was designed as a memorial of the Great Fire, which broke out in that neighbourhood in 1666 and destroyed a large part of the city. These monuments, then, resemble hysterical symptoms in being mnemonic symbols; up to that point the comparison seems justifiable. But what should we think of a Londoner who paused to-day in deep melancholy before the memorial of Queen Eleanor's funeral instead of going about his business in the hurry that modern working conditions demand or instead of feeling joy over the youthful queen of his own heart? Or again what should we think of a Londoner who shed tears before the Monument that commemorates the reduction of his beloved metropolis to ashes although it has long since risen again in far greater brilliance? Yet

fragmentation take place in dream work. *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1900) contains discussion of the unconscious process by which we fragment conscious experience into units whose logical connections to one another are manipulated and destroyed by dream work. Dream work consists of sifting through the available unconscious material, condensing, displacing and revising it with the aim of representing the dream thoughts in sensory images. Restoration of the demolished connections is the job of the interpretative process. Some dreams completely disregard the logical sequence of their material, unable to express “the relation of a contradiction, a contrary or a ‘no’” (Freud, 1900, p. 326). In *On Private Madness*, André Green describes this idea of an absence of a ‘no’ as an extraordinary observation by Freud because it demonstrates “that the non-existence of the ‘no’ is the same as the non-existence of time” (Green, 2005, p. 260). It is an idea to which Freud holds consistently. In ‘The Unconscious’, Freud says: “There are in this system no negation, no doubt, no degrees of uncertainty: all this is only introduced by the work of the censorship between the Ucs and the Pcs. Negation is a substitute, at a higher level, for repression. In the Ucs. there are only contents cathected with greater or lesser strength” (Freud, 1915c, p. 190). In Lecture 31 of his *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Freud extends this idea to the id: “The logical laws of thought do not apply in the id, and this is true above all of the law of contradiction. Contrary impulses exist side by side, without cancelling each other out or diminishing each other” (Freud, 1933, p. 106). The non-existence of the ‘no’ in the unconscious is in accordance with Freud’s view that it is the “no” of negation that permits material to move from the timeless unconscious to the domain of temporal, conscious thought: “With the help of the symbol of negation, thinking frees itself from the restrictions of repression and enriches itself with material that is indispensable for its proper functioning” (Freud, 1925d, p. 439).

Dream work operates to replace succession in time with simultaneity. Freud uses Raphael's fresco of the School of Athens which depicts the philosophers in a single group as an analogy: “It is true that they were never in fact assembled in a single hall

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every single hysteric and neurotic behaves like these two unpractical Londoners. Not only do they remember painful experiences of the remote past, but they still cling to them emotionally; they cannot get free of the past and for its sake they neglect what is real and immediate. This fixation of mental life to pathogenic traumas is one of the most significant and practically important characteristics of neurosis” (Freud, 1910a, pp. 16 – 17).

or on a single mountain-top; but they certainly form a group in the conceptual sense” (Freud, 1900, p. 314). With chronological connections thus manipulated by dream work, dreams must be understood in their own currency, and not through the logic of temporal reality which does not apply. To illustrate how inappropriate this logic is, Freud refers to a dream discussed in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, details of which he added in 1911, the year in which he wrote ‘Formulations’ (Freud, 1900, pp. 430 – 431). The dreamer dreamt that his recently dead father was alive again and felt distress that his father was dead but did not know it. In real terms, the dream is nonsensical: a temporal muddle. But Freud is able to suspend use of the currency of reality, re-establish through interpretation the temporal order removed by the unconscious and so understand the dream in terms of the dreamer’s self-reproach for his infantile death wishes against his father.

## 2. *Failure to acknowledge time's passage*

In Chapter One, I looked at the way in which the Greek myths explore the inevitable changes wrought by time and represent our denial of them: our becoming aware of the parental union is expressed in myths of the father’s displacement; our making way to the next generation is expressed in myths where the younger generation overthrows the elder; and phantasies denying death are evident in the myths of the gods who enjoy immortality and eternal youth. Myth represents the repressed wishes Freud thought lurk in the unconscious: the wish to return to childhood; the wish for life after death; and the Oedipal wishes which deny the difference in time between the generations.

Consciously, we know that we will die but the awareness of our inevitable extinction is difficult because, as Freud expresses it: “the horrors of corruption, of freezing in the ice-cold grave, of the terrors of eternal nothingness—ideas which grown-up people find it so hard to tolerate, as is proved by all the myths of a future life” (Freud 1900, p. 254). In ‘Thoughts For The Times On War And Death’, Freud writes:

What, we ask, is the attitude of our unconscious towards the problem of death? The answer must be: almost exactly the same as that of *primaeval* man. In this respect, as in many others, the man of prehistoric times survives unchanged in our unconscious. Our unconscious, then, does not believe in its own death; it behaves as if it were immortal. What we call our ‘unconscious’—the deepest strata of our minds, made up of instinctual impulses—knows nothing that is

negative, and no negation; in it contradictories coincide. For that reason it does not know its own death, for to that we can give only a negative content. Thus there is nothing instinctual in us which responds to a belief in death (Freud, 1915d, p. 296).

He says something similar a little later in 'The Uncanny': "It is true that the statement 'All men are mortal' is paraded in text-books of logic as an example of a general proposition; but no human being really grasps it, and our unconscious has as little use now as it ever had for the idea of its own mortality" (Freud, 1919c, p. 242).

As part of its timeless state, the unconscious believes itself immortal. The unconscious failure to acknowledge time's passage is a failure to acknowledge the losses that time brings with it. The failure is inevitable: the unconscious cannot know it will die for to do so would involve a cognitive step it cannot make. All loss is a negative, an idea of a present absence. The unconscious cannot acknowledge negatives; and the biggest negative of all is its future extinction.

### 3. *Inalterability of the unconscious by time*

Freud appears to remain convinced until the end that time has no effect on the repressed wishful impulses from childhood (Freud, 1900, p. 553; Freud, 1910, p. 41; Freud, 1933, p. 29 and p. 74), memory-traces (Freud, 1901, p. 274) and libidinal desires (Freud, 1932b, p. 408). More generally, all of the structures and processes of the unconscious seem beyond time's wasting effect, the primitive mind being "imperishable" (Freud, 1915d, p. 286).

Marie Bonaparte takes a different view: in her influential paper, 'Time and the Unconscious' (Bonaparte, 1940), she suggests that Freud did not hold absolutely to his thesis that unconscious phenomena remain unaffected by the process of time, based on the premise that "one can scarcely imagine any living thing, or for that matter anything at all, being immune from the effects of time" (Bonaparte, 1940 pp. 438 – 439). Her claim is, I think, difficult to sustain in the weight of evidence from Freud that all unconscious material remains unaltered by the passage of time, the most important of which I refer to below.

Freud's first explicit reference to the timelessness of the unconscious, in a footnote added in 1907 to *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (Freud, 1901), suggests that

*all* mnemic material is preserved: not only the original impression; but also the material's subsequent impressions, transformed again and again by the processes of condensation and distortion and the impact of new experiences. He says:

Theoretically every earlier state of the mnemic content could thus be restored to memory again, even if its elements have long ago exchanged all their original connections for more recent ones [...] [I]t is generally thought that it is time which makes memory uncertain and indistinct. It is highly probable that there is no question at all of there being any direct function of time in forgetting. In the case of *repressed* memory-traces it can be demonstrated that they undergo no alteration even in the course of the longest period of time. The unconscious is quite timeless (Freud, 1901, p. 274: footnote).

In his 1913 'The Claims of Psycho-Analysis to Scientific Interest', Freud confirms this at some length:

Another and far more surprising discovery has been that, in spite of all the later development that occurs in the adult, none of the infantile mental formations perish. All the wishes, instinctual impulses, modes of reaction and attitudes of childhood are still demonstrably present in maturity and in appropriate circumstances can emerge once more. They are not destroyed but merely overlaid—to use the spatial mode of description which psycho-analytic psychology has been obliged to adopt. Thus it is part of the nature of the mental past that, unlike the historic past, it is not absorbed by its derivatives; it persists (whether actually or only potentially) alongside what has proceeded from it (Freud, 1913b, p. 184).

And, in 'The Unconscious', Freud says: "Not only *some* but *all* of what is essential from childhood has been retained in these memories. It is simply a question of knowing how to extract it out of them by analysis. They represent the forgotten years of childhood as adequately as the manifest content of a dream represents the dream-thoughts" (Freud, 1915c, p. 148).

Bonaparte, trying to justify her argument that Freud did not really think that the unconscious is inalterable, cites part of a footnote from Freud's 1926 work, *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*:

With regard to the instinctual impulses themselves, we assumed that they remained unaltered in the unconscious for an indefinite length of time. But now our interest is turned to the vicissitudes of the repressed and we begin to suspect that it is not self-evident, perhaps not even the usual thing, that those impulses should remain unaltered and unalterable in this way. There is no doubt that the original impulses have been inhibited and deflected from their

aim through repression (Freud, 1926a, p. 142, footnote, as cited in Bonaparte, 1940, p. 439).

“Thus” says Bonaparte, “even Freud is prepared to admit that repressed psychic content undergoes some modification, however unalterable it may appear to our conscious minds, subject as they are to such immeasurably swifter attrition” (Bonaparte, 1940, p. 439). Boschan approves Bonaparte’s point on the basis of her extract (Boschan, 1990, p. 339). But Freud does not make the admission Bonaparte says he does, as a less selective extract from the footnote shows. Freud’s footnote continues on:

But has the portion of them [the original impulses] in the unconscious maintained itself and been proof against the influences of life that tend to alter and depreciate them? In other words, do the old wishes, about whose former existence analysis tells us, still exist? The answer seems ready to hand and certain. It is that the old, repressed wishes must still be present in the unconscious since we still find their derivatives, the symptoms, in operation. But this answer is not sufficient. It does not enable us to decide between two possibilities: either that the old wish is now operating only through its derivatives, having transferred the whole of its cathectic energy to them, or that it is itself still in existence too. If its fate has been to exhaust itself in cathecting its derivatives, there is yet a third possibility. In the course of the neurosis it may have become re-animated by regression, anachronistic though it may now be. These are no idle speculations. There are many things about mental life, both normal and pathological, which seem to call for the raising of such questions (Freud, 1926a, p. 142, footnote).

Freud, then, does *not* say that repressed psychic content is changed by time: what he does is raise questions which he continues to explore after writing the 1926 paper but without suggesting anything which detracts from his view that the unconscious remains unaffected by time, a conviction that lies behind the following strongly worded assertion in the *New Introductory Lectures On Psycho-Analysis*:

Again and again I have had the impression that we have made too little theoretical use of this fact, established beyond any doubt, of the inalterability by time of the repressed. This seems to offer an approach to the most profound discoveries. Nor, unfortunately, have I myself made any progress here (Freud, 1933, p. 74).

Initially, it might seem that Freud's claim that the unconscious is inalterable runs counter to the transformative possibilities offered by psychotherapy. But, in fact, Freud never claims that the cathartic effect of psychotherapy is to change the unconscious. Instead, he sees the task of psychotherapy as being to strengthen the

ego, either enabling it to firm up its repressive function or to permit what is repressed access to consciousness: that is, either to keep material timeless or to impose temporal order on it. Under the first topography of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud expresses the task as being to “*bring the Ucs. under the domination of the Pcs*” (Freud, 1900, p. 578, his emphasis) and, within the terms of the second topography, in the *New Introductory Lectures*, “to strengthen the ego, to make it more independent of the super-ego, to widen its field of perception and enlarge its organization, so that it can appropriate fresh portions of the id. Where id was, there ego shall be” (Freud, 1933, p. 80).

Despite an earlier confidence that the results from the psychoanalytic bolstering of the ego may be permanent, Freud seems eventually to conclude that this is not necessarily so. The early *Introductory Lectures* are optimistic: in Lecture 27, he claims: “A person who has become normal and free from the operation of repressed instinctual impulses in his relation to the doctor will remain so in his own life after the doctor has once more withdrawn from it” (Freud, 1917c, pp. 444 – 445). And, in Lecture 28, and his comparison there of hypnosis and psychoanalysis, he distinguishes the analytic treatment in a way which suggests lasting alteration: “Through the overcoming of [internal] resistances the patient's mental life is permanently changed, is raised to a high level of development and remains protected against fresh possibilities of falling ill” (Freud, 1917c, pp. 450 - 451). Lecture 34 of his *New Introductory Lectures* (Freud, 1933) is similarly confident. But Freud’s late paper, ‘Analysis Terminable and Interminable’ (Freud, 1937a), offers a more pessimistic perspective. Freud reminds us that, when the Rat Man completed his analysis, Freud at first “believed that his cure was radical and permanent” (Freud, 1937a, p. 217). But Freud realized in 1923 that his belief in the permanent nature of the Rat Man's cure was wrong and he added a footnote to the case history, ‘From the History of an Infantile Neurosis’ (Freud, 1909c) to this effect. ‘Analysis Terminable and Interminable’ emphasizes that a patient’s constitutional factors render any change potentially temporary: analysis can fail because of the weakness of the ego in puberty, menopause, and ill health; and where the strength of the death drive is such that it undermines the help afforded by psychoanalysis.

The notion of the inalterability of the unconscious fits well with another view to which Freud also held consistently: that there is an inherent incompatibility between memory, which is unconscious until remembered, and consciousness which Freud describes as “characteristically very transitory” (Freud, 1923a, p. 13): “what is conscious is only conscious for a moment” (Freud, 1940, p. 40). In this, Freud differs significantly from William James, at whom I looked a few pages earlier in the context of Freud’s and James’ shared view that perceptions consist of discontinuous quanta from which time follows. James famously gave voice to the idea of a stream of consciousness in his *Principles of Psychology* (James, 1890, p. 240) from which it follows that consciousness has duration: “[O]ur consciousness never shrinks to the dimensions of a glow-worm spark. *The knowledge of some other part of the stream, past or future, near or remote, is always mixed in with our knowledge of the present thing*” (James, 1890, p. 607, his emphasis). James thought that the duration of consciousness provided a temporal wave:

If the present thought is of A B C D E F G, the next one will be of B C D E F G H, and the one after that of C D E F G H I -- the lingerings of the past dropping successively away, and the incomings of the future making up the loss. These lingerings of old objects, these incomings of new, are the germs of memory and expectation, the retrospective and the prospective sense of time. They give that continuity to consciousness without which it could not be called a stream (James, 1890, pp. 607 – 608).

James refers to “Mr. E. R. Clay”, the pseudonym for Robert Kelly, who coined the term the ‘specious present’. Kelly described our perception of the present not as a “knife-edge, but a saddle-back, with a certain breadth of its own on which we sit perched, and from which we look in two directions into time. The unit of composition of our perception of time is a *duration*, with a bow and a stern, as it were - a rearward - and a forward-looking end” (James, 1890, p. 610). Thus James gives the present a duration of which we are conscious and from which our notion of time derives: “[W]e are constantly conscious of a certain duration - the specious present - varying in length from a few seconds to probably not more than a minute, and that this duration (with its content perceived as having one part earlier and the other part later) is the original intuition of time” (James, 1890, p. 643).

Freud contrasts his own notion of fleeting consciousness, which lacks the duration James gives to it, with memory. He wrote to Fliess in 1896 that consciousness leaves



no trace “for *consciousness and memory are mutually exclusive*” (Freud, 1896d, p. 234, his emphasis). Freud discusses further in *The Interpretation of Dreams* the idea that one system cannot both retain modifications yet remain perpetually open to the reception of fresh stimuli (Freud, 1900, pp. 539 – 540). In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, he suggests that consciousness arises *instead* of the memory trace (Freud, 1920, p. 25) and summarizes this position by way of analogy in his 1925 paper, ‘A Note Upon the ‘Mystic Writing-Pad’ (Freud, 1925b), which I looked at earlier in this chapter: the pad’s surface layers represent the perceptual system to which consciousness is connected and which forms no permanent traces; and the underlying wax slab represents memory in its provision of a permanent record.

For Freud, the mnemonic material retained in the timeless unconscious requires space and is durable. Consciousness, on the other hand, in its fleeting and transitory representations of perceptions, has little or no duration; it leaves no trace, so needs no space. With consciousness comes time. This leads me into the final part of this section on Freud’s definition of timelessness: that the idea of time cannot apply to the unconscious. In the absence of time, however, is spatiality.

#### 4. *The idea of time cannot apply to the unconscious*

The Vienna Psycho-Analytical Society met on 8th November 1911 to discuss ‘The supposed timelessness of the unconscious’. The minutes, taken by Stekel and Meinhold, are rarely cited and are noteworthy because they show Freud stressing the place of spatiality in the temporal discussion. Freud claims not only that the idea of time cannot apply to the unconscious – he refers to it as “a system in which the element of time plays no role whatsoever” - but also that the unconscious functions in terms of space; consciousness, on the other hand, Freud says, lacks spatiality but functions in terms of time. At the time of the meeting, Einstein was only four years away from publishing his theory of relativity where time and space become necessarily joined in the dependence of time on the observer’s state of motion. Here, Freud is operating very differently, dealing with time and space separately, allocating the former to the system of perception and consciousness and the latter to the unconscious.

Drawing on some of the contributions made to the discussion by other members of the society, Freud concludes the meeting as follows:

Now we are never able to recognise an unconscious process as such, but can only perceive it [its representation] in consciousness. Nevertheless, one can make assertions about the characteristics of this unconscious; they appear psychic phenomena, which are not timeless, yet allow us to draw conclusions about this system. These characteristics are: (1) the dream's disorientation with regard to time (Federn) – that is, present, past, and future are one (Spielrein); although this, of course, in the formation of the dream and not in the conscious content of the dream; (2) the fact that condensation is possible (Federn); (3) the absence of the effects of the passage of time; (4) the retaining of the objects (a characteristic that Tausk has felicitously linked with the instinct; (5) the characteristic tendency of neurotics to become fixated. All this points to a system in which the element of time plays no role whatsoever. On the other hand, the system does display something that resembles what we call "spatiality" when we refer to objects.

There are two characteristics of pathological processes that justify our adopting this point of view: (1) the peculiar phenomenon of opposite trends existing side by side, which has in a sense the quality of space; and (2) the fact that the self same psychic content produces entirely different effects on the patient, depending on whether one tells it to him or he remembers it. This permits us to infer a sort of localisation. If the philosophers maintain that the concepts of time and space are the necessary forms of our thinking, forethought tells us that the individual masters the world by means of two systems, one of which functions only in terms of time and the other only in terms of space (Nunberg and Federn, 1974, pp. 307-308).

Freud thus provides two reasons for assuming that the unconscious system has spatial qualities: first, by pointing to the co-existence of contrary trends alongside each other in the unconscious; second, by pointing to the difference in impact between our remembering material as opposed to having details of the same psychic material communicated to us by another. He concludes by making an important reference to the Kantian philosophy of time and space which I touched on in the previous section and which I look at in more detail in this section.

On the first of these points, the ability of the unconscious to contain opposites without one negating the other, Freud says much the same thing later in Lecture 31 of his 1933 *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, on the 'Dissection of the Personality', when describing the "dark and inaccessible" id:

We approach the id with analogies: we call it a chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations. [...] Contrary impulses exist side by side, without cancelling each other out or diminishing each other (Freud, 1933, p. 73).

I have looked at this idea before: in Chapter One, in my discussion of the similarities that exist between Freud's id and Ovid's Chaos in terms of their lack of organization, collective will and logical structure; and earlier in this chapter, when asserting that the non-existence of the 'no' in the unconscious accords with Freud's view that the 'no' of negation permits material to move from the timeless unconscious to the domain of temporal, conscious thought.

The second reason Freud gives at the meeting for the unconscious having a spatial quality lies in the difference between remembering something as opposed to having its details narrated to us by another. This difference lies at the heart of the distinction Freud draws between remembering as opposed to repeating, as he discusses in 'Recollecting, Repeating and Working Through' (Freud, 1914a). There, Freud suggests that it is the failure to remember what is repressed which results in its repetition: the forgotten and repressed is not remembered, not reproduced as a memory, but acted out, unconsciously repeated. In Chapter Two, I provided tragic examples from the Houses of Atreus and Thebes of the compulsive repetition of horrible deeds through the generations.

In 'The Unconscious', Freud tells us that the communication to a patient of an idea evident to the therapist but still repressed in the patient has no impact: the repression continues. In a footnote, he writes: "Actually there is no lifting of the repression until the conscious idea, after the resistances have been overcome, has entered into connection with the unconscious memory-trace. [...] To have heard something and to have experienced something are in their psychological nature two quite different things, even though the content of both is the same" (Freud, 1915d, pp. 175 – 176).

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, he continues the theme:

The patient cannot remember the whole of what is repressed in him, and what he cannot remember may be precisely the essential part of it. Thus he acquires no sense of conviction of the correctness of the construction that has been communicated to him. He is obliged to *repeat* the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, *remembering* it as something belonging to the past (Freud, 1920, p 18, his emphasis).

Freud emphasises that the function of the analyst is “to force as much as possible into the channel of memory and to allow as little as possible to emerge as repetition. [...] He must get him to re-experience some portion of his forgotten life, but must see to it, on the other hand, that the patient retains some degree of aloofness, which will enable him, in spite of everything, to recognize that what appears to be reality is in fact only a reflection of a forgotten past. If this can be successfully achieved, the patient's sense of conviction is won, together with the therapeutic success that is dependent on it” (Freud, 1920, p. 19). Not an easy task: the timing of interpretations is important and the analyst needs to be aware of the shifting movement of temporalities within the framework of the session, a process which, as André Green describes it, “jumps from one temporal axis to another seeking above all not to allow a current to develop in the psyche which might overwhelm it by reactivating a trauma or by reviving the desire to transgress what is forbidden” (Green, 2002, p. 61).

The minutes of the 1911 meeting contain Freud's claim that it is the notion of opposite trends co-existing in the id, and the difference between remembering and repetition, which allow us "to infer a sort of localisation" in the unconscious system. In the absence of time, there is instead a sense of locality, of space, of extension: something which distinguishes the unconscious from consciousness. Freud's notion of the extended quality of the psychical apparatus leads to his concluding comment in the 1911 meeting where he refers to what is essentially Kantian philosophy: "If the philosophers maintain that the concepts of time and space are the necessary forms of our thinking, forethought tells us that the individual masters the world by means of two systems, one of which functions only in terms of time and the other only in terms of space" (Nunberg and Federn, 1974, pp. 307-308).

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, when he is introducing the idea of the death drive, Freud points to the need to consider Kant's theories of time and space in the light of psychoanalytic findings of the timelessness of the unconscious and the origin of the idea of time: “At this point I shall venture to touch for a moment upon a subject which would merit the most exhaustive treatment. As a result of certain psychoanalytic discoveries, we are today in a position to embark on a discussion of the Kantian theorem that time and space are ‘necessary forms of thought’” (Freud, 1920, p. 28). As I said in the Introduction, the exhaustive treatment never really follows. However,

Freud did rework some aspects of Kant's philosophy of time and space, leading some commentators to suggest that Freud goes so far as to subvert Kantian philosophy (Molnar, 2003; and Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988, p. 453).

Freud was at the University of Vienna when Brentano recommended he read Kant to see how Kant illuminated the philosophy of David Hume (Freud, 1875c, pp. 102 - 103). It was Hume who famously awoke Kant from his 'dogmatic slumbers' and led to Kant's philosophical investigations taking a new direction, an epistemological quest to establish what we know and how we know it<sup>45</sup>. Kant sought to go beyond traditional idealism, that is, the notion that reality only exists as an idea, in his proposal that knowledge has two necessary components: experience of the external world; and the mental constructs to reason about that experience, to make a judgment call about whether or not something is real or true. Only from the joint operation of experience and reason can we achieve the synthesis from which knowledge and understanding follow. The most fundamental mental constructs to reason about experience are the 'pure intuitions' of space and time.

Kant was explicit that the things-in-themselves of the external world are unknowable<sup>46</sup>. Freud went further to state that the psychical processes of the unconscious are unknowable, too. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, he draws this distinction between psychical and material reality: "The unconscious is the true psychical reality; *in its innermost nature it is as much unknown to us as the reality of the external world, and it is as incompletely presented by the data of consciousness as*

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<sup>45</sup> Hume (1711 – 1776) in his *Treatise of Human Nature and Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Hume, 2004) asked how can we maintain the belief that we *know* certain things. How can we assume that we 'know' that every event has a cause: that, for example, we have knowledge that night will follow day? Hume argued that our experience only tells us what has happened, not what will happen. It is not analytically (in the philosophical sense) the case that the sun will rise tomorrow just because the sun has risen every day until now. We have no justification in our belief in causation but, nevertheless, our belief holds. Why? Because of what Hume describes as the 'constant conjunction' of event 'x' with event 'y'; the leap of faith we make that 'x' – say, day - , having been succeeded by 'y' – say, night - in the past, will remain so connected in the future. This is belief, not knowledge, asserted Hume. Kant disagreed and set out his counter-arguments in *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics that will be able to present itself as a Science* and his *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant, 1977).

<sup>46</sup> Things-in-themselves give off 'noumena'. These noumena are unknowable, the noumenon constituting the necessary limit to our empirical knowledge (Kant, 1929, pp. 271 - 272 (A 253, B 310)). Our encounter with noumena is through our sensations of them which we perceive as phenomena, intuiting them in two pure forms: 'outer', which is the form of representation of extension and figure (so, space); and 'inner', which is the form of representation of succession and simultaneity (so, time) (Kant, 1929, p66 (A 21, B 35)). Noumena and phenomena are well explained in Andrew Ward's *Kant: the Three Critiques* (Ward, 2006, p. 97 et seq).

*is the external world by the communications of our sense organs*” (Freud, 1900, p613, his emphasis). Michael Molnar, in his paper ‘Lived Events and Remembered Events’, presented at the THERIP conference at the Freud Museum on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2003, refers to a meeting of May 1913 between Freud, Binswanger and the Swiss philosopher, Paul Haeberlin, in which Freud asked Haeberlin whether the idea of the unconscious might be associated with Kant’s concept of the thing-in-itself (Molnar, 2003). Haeberlin apparently dismissed the comparison. Despite Haeberlin’s dismissal of the idea, Freud goes on to make explicit the connection of his own theory of the unknown unconscious with Kant’s theory of the unknown external world in “The Unconscious”: “Just as Kant warned us not to overlook the fact that our perceptions are subjectively conditioned and must not be regarded as identical with what is perceived though unknowable, so psychoanalysis warns us not to equate perceptions by means of consciousness with the unconscious mental processes which are the object. Like the physical, the psychical is not necessarily in reality what it appears to us to be” (Freud, 1915d, p171). Similarly, in *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, Freud makes the point that all psychoanalytic inferences have to be “translated back into the language of our perceptions, from which it is simply impossible for us to free ourselves. [...] Reality will always remain ‘unknowable’” (Freud, 1938a, p. 196).

Earlier in the chapter, I referred to Freud’s letter to Princess Bonaparte of 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 1938, in which Freud made the connection between the idea of time and the workings of the system Pcpt-Cs. That part of the letter goes on to make clear Freud’s agreement with Kant in principle but equally his objective to extend and transform Kant’s philosophy into psychoanalysis:

There is an area whose frontiers belong both to the outer world and to the ego: our perceptual superficies. So it might be that the idea of time is connected with the work of the system W.-Bw. Kant would then be in the right if we replace his old-fashioned ‘a priori’ by our more modern introspection of the psychical apparatus. It should be the same with space, causality, etc. (Jones, 1957, pp. 495 – 496).

Bonaparte’s paper contains (qualified) evidence of her further discussion with Freud. In suggesting that time and space are projections, Freud suggested to Bonaparte that this was a psychoanalytic translation of Kant’s theory: “May it not be the same, Freud concluded, with our external perceptions of space and time, and would not this translation into psycho-analytical language of the old *a priori* judgements of Kant

vindicate him approximately?" (Bonaparte 1940, pp. 465 – 466). I noted the consistency between this comment and some notes Freud made at the time published posthumously as 'Findings, Ideas, Problems'. Freud suggests that: 'Space may be the projection of the extension of the psychical apparatus. No other derivation is probable. Instead of Kant's *a priori* determinants of our psychical apparatus. Psyche is extended; knows nothing about it" (Freud, 1938e, p. 300). In his *Diary of Sigmund Freud 1929 - 1939*, Michael Molnar says this about Freud's 1938 notes:

[T]his speculation about space is a response to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Kant set up time and space as the final objective coordinates of perception. Freud stands that structure on its head. Instead he presents time and space as the acts of perception. Thus experience is granted primacy over metaphysical abstractions (Molnar, 1992, p XXIII).

Molnar refers to these notes again at the 2003 THERIP conference referred to above, suggesting that the notes indicate, as does Freud's attempt to associate the unconscious with Kant's unknowable things-in-themselves, that Freud "had some project of annexing Kantian philosophy by turning it upside down", that this is "a bit of an undercover leitmotiv in Freud" (Molnar, 2003). Laplanche and Pontalis similarly suggest that these notes show Freud "reversing" Kantian philosophy:

[The] extended character of the psychical apparatus is such a basic fact for Freud that he goes so far as to reverse the Kantian perspective by seeing it as the origin of the *a priori* form of space (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988, p. 453).

To me, Freud is not reversing Kantian philosophy, nor standing it on his head. He is developing it, placing the unconscious in the realm of Kant's unknowable things-in-themselves and making time and space, both of which Kant took to be pure intuitions, or forms of thought, forms of *projected* thought. In this psychoanalytic development of Kant's theory, Freud also seems to put forward a radical solution to the mind – body problem which Descartes formulated in his 1637 *Discourse on Method* when he deconstructed the person into the mental and the physical, mind and extension<sup>47</sup>. In proposing that our idea of space derives from our projections of our psychic apparatus into the outside world (Freud, 1938e, p. 300), what Freud seems to be suggesting is that mind *is* extension.

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<sup>47</sup> Brentano had recommended that Freud begin his philosophical reading with Descartes "and study all his writings because he had given philosophy a new impetus" (Freud, 1875c, pp. 102 - 103). Descartes famously suggested that, as we cannot doubt that we exist, doubting only confirming the existence of the doubter, it follows that *cogito, ergo sum* [I think, therefore I am].

When I discussed the protective shield which Freud introduces in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, I emphasised his point that, because the shield operates as a defence against external stimuli only, we tend to treat unpleasurable internal excitations as if they were external, that is, project them, so that we may bring in the shield as a defence (Freud, 1920, p. 29). Keeping this in mind, it seems to me that the first projection, which Freud suggests is of spatiality, would take timelessness with it. The evacuation of spatiality and timelessness would create the potential for consciousness and for time. Klein considers something similar in *Envy and Gratitude* in her proposal that the ego is brought into being by the first projection: "The threat of annihilation by the death instinct within is, in my view - which differs from Freud's on this point - the primordial anxiety, and it is the ego which, in the service of the life instinct - possibly even called into operation by the life instinct - deflects to some extent that threat outward" (Klein, 1975, p. 190). Temporal order would be imposed on the material within the projected space by the discontinuous method of working of the system *Pcpt.-Cs*. The unconscious from which timelessness has not been projected, however, continues as it was: its contents remain inalterable and without temporal order; and any knowledge of its own mortality, indeed any awareness of the passage of time, remains entirely lacking.

### *Part 3: The drives, their governing principles, the external world and time*

I looked earlier in this chapter at how Freud suggests that we obtain an abstract idea of time and compared this with the timeless aspects of the unconscious. This final section examines the role of the drives in the temporal process to test Freud's claim that the interplay of Eros and the death drive "dominates all of life's riddles" (Freud, 1922, p. 339); and that all of life's phenomena are a consequence of the drives' interaction (Freud, 1920, p. 97; Freud, 1933, p. 209; Freud, 1937a, p. 243; and Freud, 1940, p. 340). I hope to show that time depends not only on this interplay but on another factor: the reality principle. It is the operation of this principle which establishes the rhythm of the drives' interaction and it is from this rhythm that we gain time.

Freud provides an account of the development of his drive theory in *Civilisation and its Discontents* (Freud, 1930a). He tells us that: "In what was at first my utter perplexity, I took as my starting-point a saying of the poet-philosopher, Schiller, that



‘hunger and love are what moves the world’" (Freud 1930a, p. 117). In his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (Freud, 1905b), which contains the first explicit reference to ‘Triebe’, Freud posed an opposition between our self-preservative or egoistic drives, of which hunger is the most basic, and the sexual, or erotic, the aim of which is to preserve the species. This temporal tension, between the mortality of the self and the potential immortality of the species, is in evidence in ‘On Narcissism’ (Freud, 1914c), where Freud describes the individual as "the mortal vehicle of a (possibly) immortal substance—like the inheritor of an entailed property, who is only the temporary holder of an estate which survives him" (Freud, 1914c, p. 78). The tension is there, too, in Freud's paper on Schreber, in his discussion of our two-fold temporal orientation, “aiming on the one hand at self-preservation and on the other at the preservation of the species” (Freud, 1911a, p. 74). The individual acts as both principal, with sexual satisfaction a need; and as agent to our species which Freud described in ‘Instincts and their Vicissitudes’ as "quasi-immortal germ-plasm", the individual relegated to its “temporary and transient appendage” (ibid, p 125).

Freud's realisation that narcissism contains a libidinal component meant that the opposition between the ego-preservation and sexual drives fails to hold. It was his understanding of the libido's role in narcissism, together with his consideration of, in particular, the phenomenon of the repetition compulsion – but also sadism, masochism and hatred – that led Freud, seemingly reluctantly, to the formulation of the death drive which operates independently of the libido. Freud's reluctance can be seen in the Little Hans case history (Freud, 1909b). He writes: “I cannot bring myself to assume the existence of a special aggressive instinct alongside the familiar instincts of self-preservation and of sex, and on an equal footing with them” (Freud, 1909b, p. 140). And in *Civilisation and its Discontents*, Freud confirms: "I remember my own defensive attitude when the idea of an instinct of destruction first emerged in psycho-analytic literature, and how long it took before I became receptive to it" (Freud, 1930a, p. 120).

We can see the death drive coming, together with its connection to the repetition compulsion, in ‘The Uncanny’, the paper Freud completed whilst drafting *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. In ‘The Uncanny’, Freud writes: “It is possible to recognize the dominance in the unconscious mind of a ‘compulsion to repeat’ proceeding from the

instinctual impulses and probably inherent in the very nature of the instincts—a compulsion powerful enough to overrule the pleasure principle [...]” (Freud, 1919c, p. 238). In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud pursues this idea of the pleasure principle being overruled rather than inhibited, satisfaction being denied rather than postponed. Clinical observations demonstrate to him that certain experiences which did not and cannot ever give pleasure are endlessly repeated: the compulsive repetition in the transference of the Oedipal losses of childhood; the relationships which fail in the same way every time; the repeated unhappy choice of partner. Freud takes from these examples the “courage to assume that there really does exist in the mind a compulsion to repeat which overrides the pleasure principle” (Freud, 1920, pp. 22 – 23).

Johnston, in his *Time Driven: metapsychology and the splitting of the drive* (Johnston, 2005), is critical of Freud's "extremely loose" use of the death drive, suggesting rather harshly that Freud both marginalises temporality and lacks understanding of it. He makes the valid point that Freud equivocates between the death drive's reduction of tension to zero and the Nirvana's principle to maintain constancy of tension. But Johnston tries to infer from this equivocation that Freud makes the contradictory claim that the death drive tends towards unpleasure yet permits pleasure in the repetition compulsion (Johnston, 2005, p124). This seems wrong because it is evidence of the *denial* of satisfaction in the repetition compulsion that persuades Freud of the existence of the death drive.

Freud unites the egoistic and erotic drives in Eros to act in opposition to the death drive. Eros is conceived of as a force for unification: its aims are to connect, to bind, to preserve and to affirm. The death drive is Eros' antithesis, a force for destruction, its aims being to break connections, to dissolve what is united, to pull the living back to an inorganic state and to negate (Freud, 1923a, p. 40; Freud, 1925d, pp. 238 – 239; Freud, 1938a, p. 148 – 149). Chapter Three showed Freud draw on Greek philosophy to support his notions of Eros and the death drive: not only in Plato's Eros, which Freud places as a counter to the death drive, but also in Anaximander's *Apeiron*, the source of Freud's notion that death is the price we pay for life; and in Empedocles, Freud happily finding Eros and the death drive in principle identical to Empedocles' principles of Love and Discord (Freud, 1937a, p. 246).

Although drives in their raw state are unknowable, Freud thought he was able to establish their nature from the ideas and affective states to which they become attached (Freud, 1915a, p. 117; Freud, 1938a, p. 148). Initially indeterminate and open-ended, drives effectively have no object until one presents itself as able to provide satisfaction (Freud, 1905b p. 168; Freud, 1915a, p. 123). The drives are represented by different principles of mental governance: Eros is represented by the pleasure principle; the death drive is represented by the Nirvana principle. The explicit aim of the Nirvana principle is to “conduct the restlessness of life into the stability of the inorganic state” (Freud, 1924b, p. 159). Freud suggests that Eros can act on and modify the Nirvana principle: taking another as a sexual object, for example, is an act of self preservation which neutralizes, in part, the death drive (Freud, 1920, p. 50). Eros’ pleasure principle can itself be overridden by the death drive and Freud explains sadism and masochism in terms of a collision of Eros with the death drive, Eros operating to deflect a significant portion of the death drive into the external world in the form of the sadistic urge to dominate, the part left behind fusing with Eros in sexually exciting masochism (Freud, 1924b, pp. 163 -165). The interplay of the drives is different for different people: “Modifications in the proportions of the fusion between the instincts have the most tangible results. A surplus of sexual aggressiveness will turn a lover into a sex-murderer, while a sharp diminution in the aggressive factor will make him bashful or impotent” (Freud, 1938a, p. 149).

In Chapter Two, I looked at the death drive at work in melancholia and the attacks made by the malign superego operating within “a pure culture of the death instinct” (Freud, 1923a, p. 53). In severe cases of melancholia, where the ego sees itself deserted by its protecting forces, Freud tells us it will let itself die (Freud, 1923a, pp. 58 – 59). If the ego dies, time, of course, will die with it. Psychological death can be through psychosis, as exemplified by Schreber, whose notion of time disintegrates as he withdraws from the external world:

At the climax of his illness, [...], Schreber became convinced of the imminence of a great catastrophe, of the end of the world. Voices told him that the work of the past 14,000 years had now come to nothing, and that the earth's allotted span was only 212 years more; and during the last part of his stay in Flechsig's clinic he believed that that period had already elapsed. He himself was ‘the only real man left alive’, and the few human shapes that he

still saw—the doctor, the attendants, the other patients—he explained as being ‘miracled up, cursorily improvised men’ (Freud, 1911a, p. 68).

Freud interprets Schreber’s conviction that the world was about to end in terms of a projection: “[t]he end of the world is the projection of this internal catastrophe; his subjective world has come to an end since his withdrawal of his love from it (Freud 1911a, pp. 70 - 71). I have looked at two other important projections identified by Freud so far: one which gives us an idea of space; and one which gives us an idea of time. Now there is a third: in the catastrophic withdrawal from the external world into psychosis, the projection we make is one of the end of time.

It might be assumed that the death drive’s pull to the inorganic state is to a state of timelessness and Eros to a state of time but this would be wrong. Both drives pull towards timelessness and the period of time for which a drive remains unsatisfied is likely to be experienced as unending. I looked at this in the context of a baby, whose hunger pangs might be experienced as going on forever whilst he or she hallucinates a feed; and in the context of a young child, whose temporarily absent mother is perceived as being permanently lost.

Satisfaction of both drives seems to give rise to states of timelessness, too. I looked at the masochistic need for punishment in Chapter Two, finding timelessness in the going on forever quality of masochistic phantasies, evident in the title to Freud’s paper on masochistic phantasies, ‘A Child is being Beaten’ [Ein Kind Wird Geschlagen] (Freud, 1919a), the use of the passive present tense telling us that something is being done which has no beginning and no end. Satisfaction of Eros brings timelessness, too, as the pleasurable sense of eternity which Freud describes as “oceanic” (Freud, 1930a, p. 64). Freud thought that this state is derived from the ego’s early experience of total connection with the world. His opening chapter of *Civilization and its Discontents* (Freud, 1930a) refers to a letter his French friend and writer, Romain Rolland, wrote to him after the publication of *The Future of an Illusion* (Freud, 1927a). Rolland suggested that Freud had failed to appreciate that religious energy derives from a sensation Rolland was never without and one which he assumed was shared by millions of people. "It is a feeling which he would like to call a sensation of ‘eternity’, a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded—as it were, ‘oceanic’" (Freud, 1930a, p. 64). The state of being in love sees a similar

dissolution of temporal boundaries together with those between ego and object (Freud, 1930a, p. 66). Freud goes on to say that, whilst he cannot locate the oceanic sensation in himself ("It is not easy to deal scientifically with feelings" (ibid p. 65)), this gives him no right to deny its existence in others and so he provides a psychoanalytic explanation for it by tracing the 'oceanic' feeling back to the earliest sensations of the baby who cannot distinguish his ego from the external world. "Our present ego-feeling is, therefore, only a shrunken residue of a much more inclusive—indeed, an all-embracing—feeling which corresponded to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world about it" (ibid, p 72).

Sabbadini, in his contrast of the controlled temporal boundaries with the timeless atmosphere of the analytic encounter, suggests that the oceanic feeling is experienced in the analytic encounter. "It is because of the coexistence of different temporalities that we can come across those rare but exciting moments of insight and enlightenment in the course of the psychoanalytic process; and some of the most intense moments in our existence—giving birth to a baby, falling in love, the heights of sexual, mystical or aesthetic pleasure, probably the transition to death itself—share with the analytic experience features of its specific temporality, including the sense of timelessness: their main phenomenological features are a partial loss of the sense of identity, an 'oceanic' fusion with the object, and a momentary slackening of the bonds of time involving a regression to a more primitive temporality" (Sabbadini, 1989, pp. 306 – 307).

Satisfaction of Eros thus engenders timelessness in a pleasurable sense of being at one with the world, where we feel that we have everything we want forever. The idea that both drives pull towards a similar state is recognized by Greenberg in his paper, 'Instinct and Primary Narcissism in Freud's Later Theory: An Interpretation and Reformulation of 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (Greenberg, 1990). The paper highlights the association that the infant makes in the state of primary narcissism between pleasure and a lack of boundaries, a lack of objects and a lack of a sense of self as being different from what surrounds it. In an attempt to return to this pleasurable state, Greenberg confirms that these boundaries can be eliminated in two ways: "Either by destroying those external objects which disrupt the sense of unity or by unifying with them. In either case the result would be the same: a psychological

state of existence devoid of external objects, a state which the unconscious equates with absolute pleasure, with primary narcissism. [...] [T]he paths towards pure being (eros/sexuality) and to nothingness (thanatos/aggression) would both lead to a world without boundaries” (Greenberg, 1990, p. 279). I suggest that Greenberg’s world without boundaries is one without time. In short, neither drive leads us to time. And this is as it should be. Time follows from the operation of a principle which represents neither Eros nor the death drive: time is a consequence of the reality principle, which represents the external world.

Processes regulated by the reality principle, for example, refinding, mourning and loving another: these all require attachments to objects in the external world. When the ego’s protecting forces are benign, the ego, through the system *Pcpt.-Cs.*, can reach into the external world and form attachments with it. In his paper on Schreber, Freud describes drives as ‘being the concept on the frontier between the somatic and the mental’ (Freud, 1911a, p. 74). Freud also locates the drives as “lying on the frontier between the mental and the physical” in *Three Essays* (Freud, 1905b, p. 168) and in ‘Two Principles of Mental Functioning’, where he describes drives as operating “on the frontier between the mental and the somatic” (Freud, 1911b, pp. 121 – 122). This is the frontier along which Freud also places the system *Pcpt.-Cs.* (Freud, 1938d). This would suggest that Freud does not, as Robert Young claims he does in *Mental Space* (Young, 1994, p. 5), adopt the perspective of parallelism, where mental and physical events operate in tandem and without interaction, but, instead, makes the drives, like the metaphorical feelers put out by the system *Pcpt.-C.*, connecting factors between body and mind, biology and psychology.

Using a similar metaphor to that of feelers, Freud takes the pseudopodia of an amoeba to illustrate our object attachments in ‘On Narcissism’ (Freud, 1914c, p. 75), “A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-Analysis” (Freud, 1917a, p. 139), Lecture 26 of the *Introductory Lectures*, (Freud, 1916b, p. 416), and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud, 1920, p. 51), Freud each time comparing the emissions of pseudopodia with the emission of libido onto objects, libido which can, like those pseudopodia, be taken back into the ego.

Freud’s use of the metaphor of pseudopodia underlines two fundamental components of his theory of how we develop and maintain time. The first is our discontinuous

mode of engagement with the world, a concept to which I have devoted significant discussion in this chapter and which can be seen in the interplay of the drives as mediated by the reality principle. Eros is represented by the metaphorical feelers and pseudopodia which reach out into the external world, to sample it, judge it and form attachments with it; the death drive operates to break the connections, retract the feelers, pull back the pseudopodia; and the reality principle provides the temporal rhythm, inserting discontinuity to pull us back from the timelessness which would otherwise follow if one or other of the drives were entirely satisfied. The second component to Freud's theory of time lies with our attachments. It is the operation of the reality principle which allows us to refind the temporarily absent mother rather than hallucinate her presence, grieve our losses so that we can form new attachments rather than become melancholic, and encourages the move from being in love to loving. My understanding of Freud is that the reality principle governs the tempo of the interplay of Eros and the death drive, providing each of us with a rhythm of engagement with the world from which comes our idea of time. This time is our reality, something which our own, unique, ego will do its best to maintain until the very end.

### CONCLUSION

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I began this work by emphasising two points: the surprising lack of psychoanalytic writing on Freud's ideas of temporality; and the unexplored points of temporal relevance to be found in Freud's use of the ancient Greek canon. I suggested that an examination of Freud's use of three components of the Greek canon - myth, tragedy and philosophy – would serve to give context to those elements of Freud's metapsychology connected to time. I was hopeful that the exercise would enable the expansion of Freud's 'hints' (Freud, 1920, p. 28, footnote) and 'suspicions' (Freud, 1925b, p. 23) about time into something approaching a full account of Freud's theory of both time and its negative, timelessness.

I looked first at the importance of myths for Freud. Like dreams, Freud took myths to be vehicles into which we project our repressed phantasies and infantile wishes: the Minotaur's labyrinth becomes the projection of the child's notion of anal birth (Freud, 1933, p. 25); Medusa's head becomes the projection of the fright of castration (*ibid*, p. 24); and we project into the Greek gods those desires which we have had to renounce (Freud, 1932a, p.189). In Chapter One, I examined these projections in the context of the incestuous, murderous, cannibalistic and vengeful material of the Greek myths of the divine dynasty with a view to establishing their temporal relevance for psychoanalytic theory. I chose these myths because, in their fulfilment of our Oedipal and other repressed wishes, they seem to represent a clear denial of the passage of time which takes us ever further away from our earliest state of mind. Freud is explicit that this earliest state is one of unconscious timelessness: that is, one which accepts no beginning (so it is consistent with Freud to see in Chaos our phantasy of spontaneous birth without acknowledgment of the temporal requirement for parental priority), nor end (hence the gods' immortality).

I wanted to show that there is much more of psychoanalytic interest to be found in myths' temporal features than their explicit material which lends itself so well to



psychoanalytic interpretation. I looked, in particular, at Freud's notion of loss, the acknowledgment of which is central to Freud's understanding of how we come to time and the denial of which is particularly well represented in the Greek myth of origins through Uranus. Uranus is Gaia's parthenogenetic firstborn and partner, who never loses his exclusive relationship with his mother, a divine privilege which human beings must renounce (Freud, 1932a, p. 189).

Tolerance of loss is a precondition of what Freud describes as the "momentous step" we take when we move from primary process to secondary process functioning; from one where the pleasure principle, which brooks no delay, permits wish fulfilment through hallucination of the lost object, so fails to bring with it the experience of satisfaction, to one governed by the reality principle, where a distinction between a perception and an idea can take place (Freud, 1911b, p. 219). In Chapter Four, I examined this process in more detail, showing that the process is dependent on tolerance of loss, because the ego must inhibit the hallucination of the idea of the wished-for object, whilst a periodic sweep of incoming stimuli can be made to see if a match can be established with what is already cathected in memory. I stressed the delay which this process introduces to the system in its imposition of a deferral of pleasure so that reality testing can take place: the inhibition would not take place if there were no acceptance of the object being missing. I used the example of a hungry baby to show that, under governance of the developing reality principle, the baby learns to acknowledge the mother's absence and connect the hunger to that reality, rather than hallucinating a feed, permitting an idea of the future being different from the present in the anticipation of refinding in the future what gave satisfaction in the past.

I put forward the claim that Freud equated time with reality, both of which constitute the other side of the coin from timelessness and phantasy, which are the two principal constituents of myth. This supports my view that myths allow us to plant one foot in the enjoyably timeless realm that myths' denial of reality requires, with the other foot planted firmly in reality, thereby avoiding the primary process hallucination of wish fulfilment, a process which is always ultimately disappointing. Drawing on Freud's 'Mourning and Melancholia', I suggested that an important function of myths might be to mitigate the melancholic reaction to loss and thus explain the Greek myths'

seemingly timeless popularity: we can return to the myths over and over again to refind there, collectively, an element of what each of us has lost forever; to enjoy collective fulfilment of our wishes for eternal youth and the shame-free satisfaction of what we now call 'Oedipal' wishes and phantasies. The myths themselves therefore share the indestructible quality of the wishes they represent. Indestructibility is a criterion of timelessness for Freud and, despite Bonaparte's claim to the contrary (Bonaparte, 1940 pp. 438 – 439), I suggested in Chapters One and Four that Freud remained convinced that time has no effect on the repressed wishes which we see reflected in the myths.

Finally, on myth, I examined Freud's relatively unknown and temporally very important claim that, in addition to containing projections of our unconscious wishes, myths are also a manifestation of "endopsychology", that is, of our ability to dimly perceive and subsequently project the workings of our mind. I showed that the notion that we can somehow pierce the psychic veil and then project what we perceive is to be found throughout Freud's work (Freud, 1950, p. 312; Freud, 1914c, p. 96, footnote; Freud; Freud, 1920, p. 28; and Freud, 1938c, p. 300). As Chaos operates without the governance afforded by the principles of *space*, Freud's description of the timeless id as "a chaos" (Freud, 1933, p. 73) might, I suggested, therefore afford us insight into how we perceive the id, which operates without the governance afforded by the principles of *time*. This is especially so in the light of Freud's theory that an important task of dreamwork, which he emphasises can be seen at work in myths, too, is to translate temporal relations into spatial relations (Freud, 1900, p. 408; and Freud, 1933, p. 26). I elaborated this point in Chapter Four to make a new and important point of relevance to a psychoanalytic approach to temporality: that Freud's unexplored concept of endopsychology lies behind both the myth-making activity and the psychic activity from which we develop a notion of time. My argument followed from the 'hint' which Freud provides in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that our abstract idea of time is derived from, and corresponds to, a particular perception: that of discontinuous mode of operation of the perceptual process (Freud, 1920, p. 28). I was able to conclude from this, and my examination of Freud's correspondence with Bonaparte, that, whilst Freud thought our concept of space derives from a projection of the perception of our inner spatiality, our concept of time derives from the projection of our perception of the intermittent mode of operation of the working of

the perceptual system. In this context, I claimed that Freud was thereby extending Kant's philosophy: Kant took time and space to be forms of thought; Freud made them forms of *projected* thought. I thus put forward an alternative reading than that of Molnar (2003) and Laplanche and Pontalis (1988, p. 453), who suggest a subversive as opposed to complementary, element to Freud's use of the Kantian theory of time.

An appreciation of endopsychology, which Freud raises specifically in the context of myths, therefore enabled me to conclude that there are two points of theory contained within Freud's view that "the ancients only projected their phantasies onto the sky" (Freud, 1908d, p. 30): first, that of the common psychoanalytic trope, that the material of the myths represents our projected phantasies; second, the more subtle point that the "sky" which contains the projected phantasies is a result of more fundamental projections still: of time and space.

As Freud drew on Greek mythology so widely, I was able to develop broad themes of myths' temporal relevance to psychoanalysis: of myths' representation of the denial of time; of the role of loss in the time-making activity; and of the role of endopsychology in time. Freud's use of Greek tragedy was much more focused, Freud taking one Greek tragedy in particular to validate much of his psychoanalytic theory. Accordingly, two very specific questions lay behind my structuring of Chapter Two. I asked what an examination of the difference between Greek myth and Greek tragedy could add to our understanding of Freud's theory of time. And I asked why Freud chose to put Sophocles' tragedy of *Oedipus Rex* at the heart of psychoanalysis. I claimed that there was a common answer to both questions, an answer underpinned by temporality, and one which involves an understanding of the developmental progression which takes place according to another relatively unexamined part of Freud's theory, namely, the two-stage process whereby, through an internalisation of what is external, we develop the capacity for guilt.

My examination of Freud's account of guilt established that, in its first stage, a sense of guilt is evoked only in situations where one's 'bad' actions are discovered by an external figure of authority. Only on an internalisation of these authority figures does guilt become an internally mediated proposition from which there is no escape. I suggested that the Greek myths tap into the relative freedom afforded to us in the first

stage of guilt: access to the myths is open to all, a freedom which means that no-one can 'catch us at it' as we vicariously fulfil our repressed wishes through, for example, Uranus, who sleeps with his mother, and Kronos, who castrates his father. Greek tragedy, on the other hand, in its analysis of judgment and guilt, made conscious through the creative work undertaken by the tragedian and the spectator, moves away from representation of the timeless 'if only!' wishes of the id. I suggested that tragedy seems to reflect, instead, the 'look what happens if!' warnings from the agencies of judgment and guilt: the censor; the conscience; and the superego. I brought out that part of Freud's theory which states that these agencies develop as a corollary of the decline of the Oedipus complex, together with the development of what Freud calls the time-factor (Freud, 1914c, p. 96, footnote). Thus I inferred that Freud believed we only develop an abstract notion of time on or after acquiring an internally mediated sense of guilt. I claimed that this difference between externally and internally mediated guilt might explain the contrast between our enjoyment of the acts of incest and violence portrayed in the Greek myths as opposed to our horrified response to the same acts when carried out by Sophocles' Oedipus.

I then addressed the 'Why Oedipus?' question by way of comparison of Aeschylus' and Sophocles' accounts of Orestes and Oedipus respectively. I suggested that Aeschylus' account of the endless repetition of premeditated acts of revenge within Orestes' family, and of the judgment of Orestes, which takes place in a court of law, mirrors the first, external, stage of guilt in Freud's theory, a point in psychic development when the 'time-factor' is not fully incorporated. In contrast, in Sophocles' account, Oedipus judges and punishes himself for his unintentional deeds (on Freud's reading), and I suggested that Sophocles' tragedy reflects the internal stage of guilt in Freud's theory.

My discussion looks, too, at the timeless element to the compulsion which lies in its interminable repetition of unconscious material. I believe that Sophocles' portrayal of Oedipus can be distinguished from Aeschylus' portrayal of Orestes on the basis that the process of Oedipus' revelation forces the audience to remember, to give temporal (and temporary) acknowledgment to those memories we would prefer to forget; there is no such revelation in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, no such recognition of the contents of our inner minds.

I also drew attention to the theatrical development in Greek tragedy, whereby the numbers of actors in addition to the chorus was increased from Thespis' singleton to two actors by Aeschylus, and from two actors to three by Sophocles. My point was that, whilst Aeschylus' introduction of the second actor permitted representation of guilt as something which follows from the judgment of external forces, as exemplified by Orestes' trial, Sophocles' innovation of the third allows exploration within the dynamic theatrical space thus afforded of the triangular topography within which the superego sits in judgment and from which the time-factor follows. I concluded that one reason why Freud may have chosen Sophocles' Greek tragedy of *Oedipus Rex* to validate Freud's own theory of human development is related to temporality: Sophocles' tragedy captures the psychic move whereby guilt becomes an internally mediated proposition, a transition during which the superego emerges, taking us from the state of amoral timelessness represented by myths into the guilt-ridden time of tragic consciousness.

I then turned to the final component of the Greek canon I wanted to examine: the philosophical one. I made the general point that Freud shared an investigative mind-set with the ancient Greeks, one which allied observation with speculation, the speculative component of which was anachronistic in Freud's scientific world of empiricism. I suggested that it was this mind-set which led the Presocratics and Freud to draw similar spatio-temporal conclusions about the fundamental constituents of our external and internal worlds: the Presocratics examined the nature and processes of the external world and found the underlying stuff of external reality to be 'unlimited' or infinite; Freud took the royal road in the opposite direction to establish the nature of the unconscious and found it to be timeless.

I examined the influence of three philosophers in particular on Freud's theory of time: Anaximander, Empedocles and Plato. I showed that Anaximander's fragment, *To Apeiron*, had a specific bearing on Freud's theory of time. The fragment was referred to by Freud in *Totem and Taboo* in the context of punishment for the original sin, which was, in Freud's view, the real murder of the primal father by the primal horde. I showed that it is Freud's view that the collective memory of this first murder is indestructible (indestructibility being a quality of timelessness for Freud), despite our efforts to forget it, and that it is from this primal sin that the sense of guilt derives.

This fits not only with the notion that time emerges from the same psychic processes which initiate guilt, which I discussed in Chapters One and Four, but also lends itself to a reading of Anaximander by Freud that makes an exit from the timeless *apeiron* into time a temporary one; a departure for which the price is a compulsory return.

I noted with interest Freud's repeated misquotation of Shakespeare's Prince Hal's line to Falstaff - "Why, thou owest God a death" (King Henry IV, Part 1) - as "Why, thou owest Nature a death" (Freud, 1899b, pp. 343 – 344; Freud, 1915d, p. 289; and Jones, 1972, p. 18). I thought it perhaps too much to claim that Freud's attribution of creditor status to Nature, not God, was a sign of Anaximander's influence on Freud overriding the Shakespearian text in Freud's recollection; but I wanted to make the point that Freud is committed to the notion that our death constitutes repayment of a debt: a debt of which the unconscious is completely unaware. Freud is explicit that, as part of its timeless nature, the unconscious believes itself to be immortal (Freud, 1915d, p296). I emphasized that this failure to grasp that our time is limited is one of the ways in which Freud's idea of the timelessness of the unconscious can be understood. All loss is a negative, an idea of a present absence. The unconscious cannot acknowledge negatives; and the biggest negative of all is its future extinction.

I connected Freud's reading of Anaximander in *Totem and Taboo*, that we emerge from the *apeiron* in some way tainted by that act of emergence and at the price of an inevitable return to it, with what becomes expressed by Freud as the death drive. Freud finds pleasing similarities between his own theory of the dual drives of Eros and destructiveness and that of Empedocles, who took the principles of Love and Strife (or discord) to govern the external world and the life of the mind. Freud, however, distinguishes between his and Empedocles' theories on the basis that Freud's theory has "biological validity" but Empedocles' is "cosmic phantasy" only (Freud, 1937a, p. 245), Freud first equating the theories to obtain Greek authority for his own before squashing Empedocles' in an identical way to his treatment of Plato a little later.

In my examination of the role of the drives in the temporal process, I established that both Eros and the death drive pull towards timelessness. Satisfaction of Eros, which is represented by the pleasure principle, engenders timelessness in an experiential sense of being at one with the world, where we feel that we have everything we want

forever. And the death drive, represented by the Nirvana principle, and set in opposition to Eros, pulls us, too, to a state of timelessness, beyond pleasure, destroying the work of consciousness which makes what Freud calls our “chronological connections” (Freud, 1897e, p. 247) and taking us beyond temporal experience altogether as the undiluted Nirvana principle seeks to “conduct the restlessness of life into the stability of the inorganic state” (Freud, 1924b, p. 159). The reality principle inserts delay and discontinuity into the psychic system to pull us back from the timelessness which would otherwise follow if one or other of the drives were entirely satisfied. Both Freud and Empedocles claimed that the interplay of the respective drives and principles, as Freud puts it, “dominates all of life’s riddles” (Freud, 1922, p. 339). I offered a reading of Freud to the effect that the riddle of time requires more than consideration of the drives for its solution: for it is only through the operation of the reality principle, which represents the external world, that the necessary rhythm is established between the two opposing drives for a sense of time to emerge.

Eros was Plato’s concept, one Freud claimed “coincides exactly with the love-force, the libido of psychoanalysis” (Freud, 1921a, p. 91). I highlighted some other less well known and unacknowledged similarities between their theories, in particular, Plato’s description in the *Timaeus* of the immortal soul being so over-stimulated by the excitations from the external world as it enters the mortal body that it desires nothing more than to reduce the excitation and return to its original state (*Timaeus* 44Af). I stressed that this is, of course, very similar to Freud’s idea of the death drive as expressed in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as being: “an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces” (Freud, 1920, p. 36, his emphasis). The essential difference between Plato’s soul and Freud’s concept of the mind lies in their differing temporal qualities: for Plato, the soul *is* immortal, so the domain from which it comes and to which it returns is one of eternity; for Freud, the id wrongly believes itself to be immortal and the state to which the death drive pulls it is one of extinction.

Plato introduced the idea of a divine and benevolent creator: a ‘demiurge’. Plato’s *Timaeus* contains his theory of time which he took to be the celestial motion initiated

by this demiurge, time being the movement of the celestial bodies themselves (and not the measure of their movement). I pursued the question as to whether Freud had read this dialogue and concluded both that it is impossible to tell and that, in the context of my discussion, it does not really matter. Freud would have had no interest in that side of Plato's philosophy which relies on a demiurge to set into motion those heavenly bodies which Plato thought give us time. This is, indeed, the type of cosmic phantasy which Freud eschewed.

I also showed the different (and contradictory) ways in which Freud drew on the *Symposium*, Plato's dialogue which examines the nature of love and the themes of attraction and repulsion. Plato has Aristophanes recount a myth of there having originally been three sexes: male; female; and an androgynous combination of both in one. I showed that Freud moves from a mistaken interpretation of the myth in 1905, in a discussion of homosexuality, to a suggestion in 1920 that Plato's use of the myth provides support for his theory that all drives seek to restore an earlier state of things, and then to an opposite view in the *Outline*, when Freud finally decides that Eros does *not* follow the general principle that drives seek to restore an earlier state.

Finally, I looked at Plato's pupil, Aristotle, noting that, although Freud referred to several of Aristotle's works, principally those on dreams, he makes no reference to Aristotle *Physics*, in which Aristotle's theory of time is contained. I suggested that Aristotle's claim that time is that which can be counted would not have resonated sufficiently with Freud: for Freud's speculations were drawing him away from the empirically countable towards a qualitative conclusion about time: that time is a product of the mind of the counter.

It became clear to me that Freud framed his profound psychoanalytic findings about the creation and destruction of time in terms of the myths and cosmologies of the Greek philosophers rather than their philosophies of time. Further, the contributions of the Greek philosophers are to Freud's ideas about timelessness not time: Plato's Eros is placed by Freud as a counter to the death drive; Anaximander's *Apeiron* is a possible source of Freud's notion that death is the price we pay for life; and Empedocles' principles of Love and Discord are in principle identical to Eros and the death drive. These aspects of Greek philosophy are all to do with timelessness.



Chapter Four consolidated the themes which had emerged from my examination of the Greek influences on Freud in the preceding chapters in a more technically detailed focus on three distinct areas: time; timelessness; and the temporality of the drives. I noted that an important aspect of Freud's theorising about time turns on notions of periodicity and discontinuity, notions where the influence of the ancient Greeks appears to have little specific impact. As I followed Freud's different means of expression of our discontinuous engagement with the world – the feelers, the pseudopodia, the ego's palpations, the emission of quanta – I became aware of the importance to Freud of our attachments to objects in the external world in our development of a sense of time. Laplanche's critique of Freud is that Freud fails to acknowledge the essential part of the Other in our development of both consciousness and time (Laplanche, 1976; Laplanche, 1992; and Laplanche, 1999a). I thought a revision of this critique perhaps necessary on the following grounds: that the example Freud provides of the first lost object is the mother's breast (Freud, 1950, p. 328); Freud's view that all of our subsequent loving relationships are an attempt to refind this earliest of attachments (Freud, 1905b, p. 222), refinding being part of the reality-testing process which is part of the activity from which our abstract notion of time follows; and the fact that the superego, which develops hand in hand with the time factor, represents the internalised figures of authority with whom we have formed the strongest of attachments. Freud's theory of time seems to rely on the loss, refinding and internalising of our attachments and Freud shows that detachment from these objects can give rise to catastrophic end of the world phantasies, exemplified by Schreber, where our hard-won temporal boundaries disintegrate. Finding evidence of the importance of the other in Freud's work on temporality led me to suggest a revision of Laplanche's critique of Freud.

Laplanche is one of a number of important contributors to the secondary literature on Freud and temporality whose work I suggested might be revisited. I countered Bonaparte's claim that Freud did not hold to his view that time has no effect on repressed wishes and demonstrated that indestructibility is an important criterion of timelessness for Freud. I significantly extended the point made by Green that discontinuity is an important part of Freud's metapsychology (Green, 2002, p. 63). And I refuted the view taken by Molnar, Laplanche and Pontalis (Molnar, 2003; and

Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988, p. 453), that Freud attempted to subvert Kant's philosophy of time by showing that, instead, Freud extended it.

I believe that I have made a significant contribution to the psychoanalytic literature on temporality in my provision of the fullest account to date of Freud's views on time and timelessness, taking into account his published works, correspondence, contributions to the Viennese meetings and the limited secondary sources. I have explored Freud's thoughts on the indestructible nature of the unconscious; the connections between reality, reality-testing, consciousness and abstract time; the role of delay, inhibition, finding and refinding; the self-monitoring process; loss, lack and time; time and the drives; and temporality and spatiality. This contribution would not have been possible without bringing the Greek canon into dialogue with psychoanalysis, something which has not been done in this way before.

My thesis has shown that the dialogue works on several different levels. At its most basic, it demonstrates the extent of the Greek influence on Freud and how familiar he was with those components of the Greek canon I discussed: myth, tragedy and philosophy. At a slightly deeper level, what emerges is the importance to his theory of time of Freud's Greek way of thinking: like the Presocratics, Freud blended speculation with empiricism (and was penalized for his anachronistic mindset); and, like Plato, Freud used myth to express his more profound findings, which suggests that Freud was both *Forscher* and *Mystiker*, rather than one or the other. This understanding was very important for it enabled me to bring out Freud the scientist cautiously finding our notion of time in our intermittent mode of perception of external stimuli; and Freud the mystic suggesting that time itself is the projection of those perceptions. I brought these important aspects of Freud's approach to bear on the deepest level of the dialogue where I was able to trace and give context to the subtle nuances of Freud's metapsychology about time through his use of myth, tragedy and philosophy. This allowed significant new material to emerge which I have summarised above. Of particular note is my elaboration of the time-making activity through elucidation of Freud's concept of endopsychic myth-making, something which Freud calls psycho-mythology (Freud, 1897e, p. 286), thus bringing psychoanalysis into direct dialogue with mythology. I was able to show that it is consistent with Freud to claim that both myth-making and time-making involve the

projection of the perceptions we have of the inner workings of our mind; and that individual time came into being on the creation of the first myth.

The dialogue meant that I was able to avoid treating the components of the Greek canon in isolation and maintain focus on the transitional stages between Greek myth, tragedy and philosophy. It was looking at the transition from the guilt-free, timeless quality of myths to the guilt-ridden, time-fullness of tragedy which revealed to me the importance of the role of guilt in the emergence of ego, superego and time from the timeless state of the id, an important aspect of psychic development on which I have come across no literature. The dialogue enabled me to give context to the inference I drew from my reading of Freud that, as guilt becomes an internally mediated proposition, the time-factor comes into being with the internal agencies of observation from which guilt derives. The context comes from a similar transition I observed in the theatrical development of Greek tragedy, something on which there appears to be no commentary. For it was my discussion of Sophocles' introduction of a third actor, and my comparison of the juridical issues framing the temporal questions raised in Aeschylus' *Orestia* and Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, which enabled me to make a novel suggestion: that the importance of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* for Freud is to be found in his recognition that the tragedy represents the topography of mind in which guilt is an internal function and in which the time factor is incorporated.

The dialogue was equally important in my discussion of Greek philosophy for here, in his use of Anaximander's *Apeiron*, I was able to find Freud anticipating the death drive and its pull back to timelessness seven years before the death drive's appearance in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud, 1920). Another interesting point to emerge was evidence of Freud as the *Forscher*, or researcher, granting his own theory "biological validity" but then finding Empedocles' theory, as well as in principle identical to Freud's own theory of the drives, mere "cosmic phantasy" (Freud 1937a, pp. 244 – 45). This has to be read in the light of Freud the *Mystiker*, or mystic, producing a similarly cosmic phantasy in his explanation of both space and time as projections: space the projection of the perception of our inner spatiality; and time the projection of our perception of the intermittent mode of operation of the working of the perceptual system.

I took delight from working with such deeply interesting and, I believe, complementary material provided by Freud and the Greek canon. I want to end this section with a piece of evidence given by Freud himself that the two often coincide in psychoanalysis. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud analyses his dream about Irma. His associations take him from a reference to 'propyls' in the dream first to the scientific term 'propionic acid' but then to 'Propylaea' which Freud assumes the reader will know is the entrance to the Acropolis (Freud, 1900, p. 115 and p. 294).

I think that there are two specific areas in which further research might throw further light on Freud's theory of time: one to do with time and gender; the other to do with Freud and space. On the first, I made the point that the resolution of the Oedipus complex, being different for boys and girls, might allow us to infer that time in Freud's theory is a gendered construct on the basis that, if the female superego which emerges as a conclusion of the Oedipus complex is qualitatively different from that of the male, then so is the notion of time which follows from its incorporation. I did not go further than this. It would be interesting to develop further Freud's position on gendered time, remaining true to Freud but taking into account the ideas of feminine time of, for example, Julia Kristeva (Kristeva, 1981; 1996), Luce Irigaray (Irigaray, 1985; 1998) and Judith Butler (Butler, 1990; 1993).

On the second point, my discussion inevitably involved looking at Freud's views on space. My reading of minutes of a 1911 meeting of The Vienna Psycho-Analytical Society confirmed that Freud thought the unconscious had precisely the spatial quality lacking in consciousness. The unconscious is timeless but requires space to be in; and consciousness provides us with time but requires no space. This evidence, in conjunction with the results of my examination of Freud's correspondence with Bonaparte, enabled me to show that Freud believed our idea of space derives from the projection of our extended psychic apparatus into the outside world and that it is because of this projection that we assume the conscious part of the mind lacks spatiality. Further, Freud took space to be a projection, too: the very first. I contributed the suggestion that, if the first projection is of spatiality, the quality of timelessness would be evacuated with it, thus creating the potential for consciousness and for time. Freud on spatiality is an area which would undoubtedly repay research.

As I reach the end of my exercise, I am struck by just how subtle and profound Freud's relationship with the Greek canon really was: so much more than that of plunderer and plundered, as some critics would have it. I believe that I have shown that it is a mistake for classical scholars to ignore Freud's contribution. Equally, I hope to have made the point that psychoanalysis can only be enriched if those of us with an interest in Freud appreciate both the extent of Freud's familiarity with the canon and the enormous impact the canon had on psychoanalysis generally and Freud's metapsychology of time and timelessness in particular.

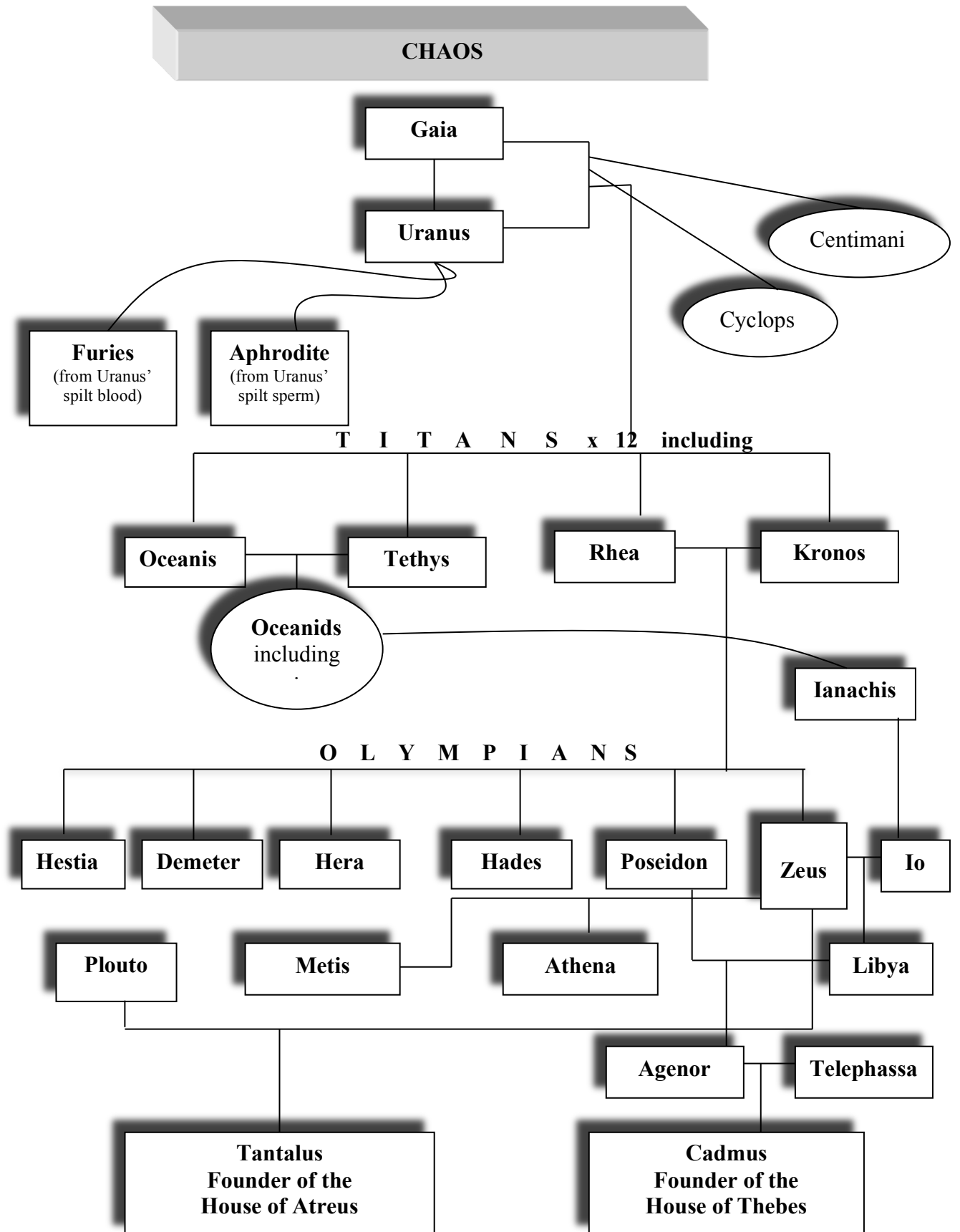
## APPENDIX I

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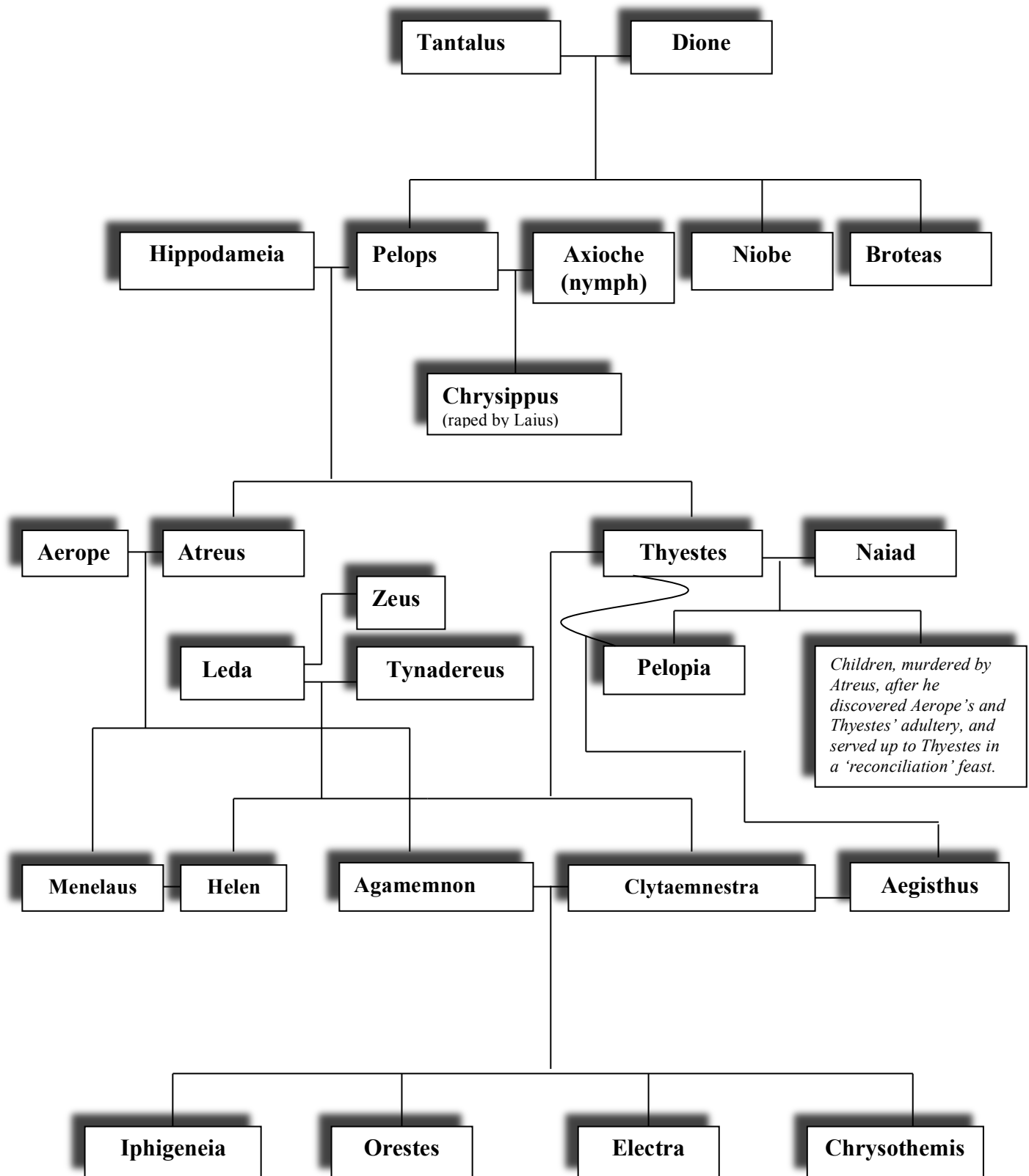
### FAMILY TREES

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1. Dynasty of Greek gods: from Chaos to Tantalus and Cadmus, heads of the Houses of Atreus and Thebes.
2. House of Atreus: from Atreus to Orestes.
3. House of Thebes: from Cadmus to Oedipus.

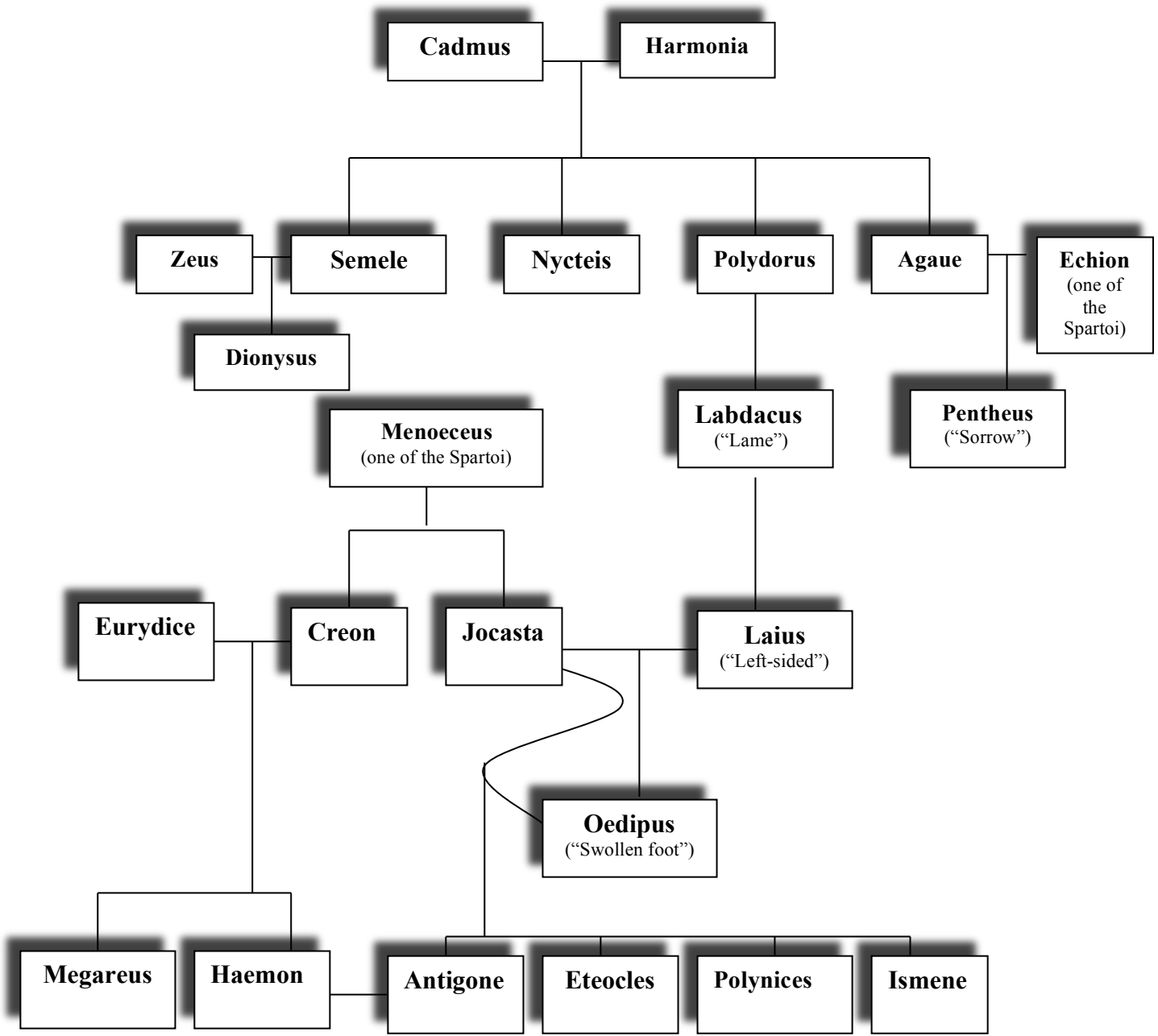


## HOUSE OF ATREUS





HOUSE OF THEBES



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THE HOUSES OF ATREUS AND THEBES: THE ANCESTORS OF  
ORESTES AND OEDIPUS

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*From Tantalus to Orestes*

Tantalus, son of Zeus and Plouto, steals ‘good’ food, ambrosia and nectar, from his parents; and he attempts to feed them ‘bad’ food, in the form of his casseroled son, Pelops, purportedly to test the gods’ omniscience by seeing whether they would partake in a feast prepared from Pelops’ stewed flesh. The gods realise what Tantalus has done and disgustedly refuse to eat; all except Demeter who, mourning the abduction of her daughter, Persephone, by her brother, Hades, absentmindedly tucks in and eats Pelops’ shoulder. By way of punishment, and continuing the forbidden food theme, the gods condemn Tantalus to spend eternity in Hades ‘tantalised’ by food and drink held just out of his reach. Fortunately, the gods are able to collect up Pelops’ body parts and, after they have been boiled up in a sacred cauldron, Pelops is restored to life (with the shoulder inadvertently eaten by Demeter replaced by one fashioned from ivory).

Pelops falls in love with Hippodameia, the daughter of King Oenomaus. The prophecy has been made Oenomaus will be killed by his future son-in-law. Pelops’ great-great-grandfather, Uranus, was overthrown by his son, Kronos; and Kronos, in his turn, was overthrown by his son, Zeus. In each of those violent successions, the son was assisted by his mother. Now, with Pelops, a different element is introduced: the father will be overthrown by the man who is to take his daughter from him. The stakes are high and the father/son (in-law) rivalry is played out in a chariot race in which Oenomaus, trying to avoid the prophecy, takes on suitors. If the suitor wins, he will gain Hippodameia’s hand; if he loses - as all suitors had so far - Oenomaus will kill him. Pelops bribes the king’s charioteer, Myrtilus, Hermes’ son, with a promise of half of the kingdom and some time alone with Hippodameia, if Myrtilus will replace the king’s chariot’s wheel pins with wax. Myrtilus does so, and this causes

Oenomaus' death in the race, as foretold. Myrtilus survives the crash but, rather than rewarding him as promised, Pelops ungratefully murders Myrtilus instead, throwing him into the sea. As Myrtilus drowns, he curses Pelops' House, the House of Atreus.

Pelops and Hippodameia go on to have twin sons, Atreus and Thyestes, and Pelops has another son, Chrysippus, with the nymph, Axioche. Chrysippus is raped by Laius (Oedipus' father) when Laius is under Pelops' protection, the Thebes' throne having been seized. In Apollodorus' version of the myth, Chrysippus then commits suicide. Laius' rape of Chryssipus brings down Pelops' curse on the House of Thebes and sets the sphinx off to Thebes.

Pelops leaves his Arcadian flock of sheep to his sons, Atreus and Thyestes, on his death. Hermes, still looking to avenge the murder of his son, Myrtilus, by Pelops, provocatively introduces a lamb with golden fleece to the flock. Atreus vows to sacrifice his best lamb to Artemis but, before doing so, extracts the golden-fleeced lamb and gives it to his wife, Aerope, to hide. This action by Atreus leads directly to the death of his yet unborn granddaughter, Iphigenia.

Aerope, who is having an adulterous affair with her husband's twin brother, Thyestes, does not hide the lamb as requested by her husband but, instead, passes the lamb to Thyestes. Thyestes, the younger of the twins, then obtains Atreus' agreement that whoever has the lamb with the golden fleece should succeed to the Mycenae throne. Atreus, comfortable in the knowledge that his wife has the lamb, agrees. But Thyestes produces the stolen lamb and claims the throne. Ironically, being an adulterous and deceitful type himself, Zeus thought Thyestes' manouvreings to be unfair and persuades Thyestes to relinquish his claim to the throne. Zeus indicates his divine approval of Atreus by causing the sun move backwards through the sky, from West to East and, secure under this sign of Zeus' approval, Atreus banishes Thyestes and murders Aerope for her infidelity.

After Thyestes begs to return to Mycenae, Atreus, in a monstrous pretence of reconciliation, invites his brother to a banquet. Once again, human flesh is on the table: this time, the cooked flesh is from Thyestes' sons, Atreus' nephews. Thyestes remains unaware of the ingredients until it is too late.

“When he sees the monstrous thing he’s done, he shrieks,  
He reels back head first and vomits up that butchery,  
Tramples the feast –brings down the curse of Justice:  
‘Crash to the ruin, all the race of Pleisthenes, crash down!’”  
(Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 1619-1635).

Thyestes’ son, Aegisthus, avenges his father by killing Atreus and exiling Atreus’ sons, Agamemnon and Menelaus<sup>48</sup>. Their protector, King Tynadereus of Sparta, allows the brothers to marry his twin daughters, Clytaemnestra and Helen<sup>49</sup>, Agamemnon first murdering Clytaemnestra’s existing husband, Tantalus<sup>50</sup>, and their son, bringing to an end Clytaemnestra’s first line of succession before beginning his own with her. Orestes is the only son and one of the children of Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra.

#### *From Cadmus to Oedipus*

Cadmus, Poseidon’s grandson, founded Thebes whilst searching unsuccessfully for his sister, Europa, whom Zeus had abducted. Cadmus slew Ares’ dragon, which was guarding a sacred spring, and subsequently married Ares’ daughter, Harmonia.

Cadmus sows Ares’ dragon’s teeth and reaps a crop of aggressive fighters, the Spartoi. One Spartalos goes on to father Jocasta, Oedipus’ mother; another, Echion, becomes the husband of Cadmus’ daughter, Agaue, and they have a son, Pentheus, in whose favour Cadmus abdicates. Pentheus's name means ‘Sorrow’ and he meets a nasty end. Having mocked Dionysus, and his secret rites, pretending a rigid adherence to law and order, Pentheus nonetheless readily and hypocritically accepts an invitation from a disguised Dionysus to witness the ecstatic dances of Dionysus’ female devotees, including Pentheus’ mother and her sisters. Dionysus conceals Pentheus in a tree. In his case study of the Wolf Man, Freud tells us that: “[A]s I have often been able to satisfy myself, a high tree is a symbol of observing, of scopophilia.

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<sup>48</sup> In Aeschylus' account, Thyestes has an infant son, Aegisthus, who survives the banquet, and recounts it as above. In other accounts, Thyestes asks the Delphic oracle how to take revenge and is told to sleep with his daughter, Pelopia, to conceive the son, Aegisthus, who will later avenge him. As an adult, Aegisthus murders his uncle, Atreus; and Aegisthus and Thyestes then rule Argos jointly.

<sup>49</sup> Twin sisters, but not genetically: Clytaemnestra had a human father, Tynadereus; whereas Helen was a daughter of Zeus).

<sup>50</sup> This Tantalus is variously described as grandson of the founder of the house, or son of Pelops or son of Thyestes from his adulterous relationship with Aerope.

A person sitting on a tree can see everything that is going on below him and cannot himself be seen” (Freud, 1918b, p 42). But then Dionysus points Pentheus out to the women who, in a frenzy, leap on him:

“His mother first,  
as priestess, led the rite of death, and fell upon him.  
He tore the headband from his hair, that his wretched  
mother might recognise him and not kill him. “Mother,” he  
cried, touching her cheek, “it is I, your own son Pentheus,  
whom you bore to Echion. Mother, have mercy; I have sinned,  
but I am still your own son. Do not take my life!”  
(Euripides, *The Bacchae*, 1115-1124).

His pleading comes to nothing: his mother and aunts tear Pentheus into pieces on Mount Cithaeron (the mountain where Oedipus is later to be abandoned), his mother carrying off his head. A similar fate befalls Cadmus’ son, Polydorus, to whom the crown of Thebes then passes. The overt denial of sensuality in both Pentheus and Polydorus leads to their murder by female members of their family. This father's and son's shared scorn of Dionysian rites and a love of law and order indicates a devaluation of things feminine and an overvaluation of things male for which skewed assessment they pay a heavy price.

Labdacus becomes king of Thebes on Polydorus’s death. On Labdacus’ death, his son, Laius, is expelled from Thebes and takes shelter with Pelops, Tantalus’ son, of the Atreus House. Laius rapes Pelops’ son, Chrysippus, who then, according to some accounts, commits suicide. Pelops curses Laius and his family: the prophecy is made that, if ever Laius has a son, that son will murder Laius (so this prophecy only contains the parricidal half of the prophecy which Oedipus is given); and the sphinx sets off to guard the entrance to Thebes and to kill anyone who fails to answer her riddle correctly.

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*IJP*: International Journal of Psychoanalysis  
*IRP*: International Review of Psychoanalysis  
*SE*: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols., London: Hogarth Press.

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